

**An exploration of stakeholder perceptions on the link
between student self-efficacy and their employability
for MBA students in India**

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ABSTRACT

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An exploration of stakeholder perceptions on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability for MBA students in India

This thesis explored the perceptions that the students, faculty and employers of a Mumbai based business school had of the possible link between student self-efficacy and their employability.

Research indicates that employers place significant importance on communication skills, social skills and critical thinking abilities, among other attributes of job candidates, while making their hiring decisions. However, some surveys have indicated that a significant proportion of employers are dissatisfied with the employability of fresh college graduates.

The disparity between university efforts to develop student employability and employers' dissatisfaction indicates a possible gap in understanding among various stakeholders about the attributes needed for student employability. Much research has been done in western countries in this area, but there has been less research done in the Indian environment. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of those involved in the employment of fresh college graduates in India, and to offer insights that might inform university efforts to build student employability.

The study was conducted via an interpretive phenomenological analysis of the perceptions of three sets of stakeholders of a Mumbai based business school on graduate attributes and employability. In particular, their perceptions of the graduate attribute of self-efficacy was explored as it has been shown to be a key contributor to the development of other graduate attributes and is considered to be malleable to external interventions.

Data was collected through individual interviews with 10 employers and group discussions with 1 set of faculty members and 2 sets of MBA students. A thematic analysis of the similarities and differences in their perceptions was then conducted and the data was viewed in the context of employability research and research on self-efficacy done in other countries.

Employers' perceptions on the attributes that contributed to a graduate's long-term performance on the job included communication skills, person-environment fit, academic performance, personal adaptability and self-confidence. This was in contrast to the perceptions of the students and faculty who focused mainly on the attributes needed to perform well in the job hiring process. This may be due to the limitations of the job hiring process, where employers often determine a graduate's suitability for a job role through the signals given by the attributes that are more visibly apparent.

All three-stakeholder groups agreed on the importance of self-efficacy and related self-concepts as key attributes that contribute to the development of the other attributes needed for employability, along with suggestions on how to enhance it. This indicates that the perceptions of Indian stakeholders on the importance of self-efficacy seem to agree with the research findings in western countries of similar groups of stakeholders. Employers viewed a job candidate's visible self-confidence in the job hiring process as a signal of their level of self-efficacy, which may explain the importance that students and faculty placed on displaying self-confidence over developing other employability attributes. This could lead to employer dissatisfaction as the hired candidate may not actually possess the desired attributes needed.

The findings of this research offer a perspective on employability in the Indian context along with recommendations for Indian institutions on ways they can develop graduate employability through enhancing student self-efficacy and recommendations for Indian employers on ways they can alter their hiring process to determine if job candidates actually possess the attributes they visibly display.

KEYWORDS

Graduate employability, graduate attributes, self-efficacy, business education

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The demand for post graduate business education in India has risen rapidly among fresh graduates and working executives over the last decade. Much of this is due to the need for companies in the knowledge-based service economy to hire junior employees who have the ability to understand business needs and manage them effectively (Rizvi & Aggarwal, 2005). In many cases, employers view business schools primarily as recruitment centres to identify and hire the right entry level talent (Anita, 2016). Unfortunately, a large proportion seem to find Indian management graduates to be lacking the necessary job skills (Rao, 2014). A survey by the private assessment company, Merittrac (2012, p. 18) states that around 77% of Indian Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates are considered unemployable by industry employers, if both general abilities and their communications skills are considered. However, the finding of this survey should be viewed with a measure of caution, keeping in mind that reports from private companies like this may not have the rigor of academic research and may be prone to possible bias for commercial considerations.

Many Indian business schools are concerned that a significant proportion of their graduates are not considered to be employable and have started collaborating with industry on their curricula, setting up guest lectures from industry professionals and are sending their students for internships to mitigate the problem (Dhar, 2012). Some of them are also incorporating classes that focus on helping students to build their soft skills (Rao, 2014). In spite of these initiatives, the employability gap seems to be significant (Babu, 2016) and could slow the growth of the Indian economy (Kohli, Bandhopadhyay & Kohli, 2015).

Similar concerns about graduate employability have been expressed by employers in other regions of the world, with significant research being undertaken to understand the needs of employers in relation to graduate skills and the implications of this for higher education (Tomlinson, 2012; Archer & Davidson, 2008; Belt, Drake & Chapman, 2010).

However, far less research has been conducted in India in the same area. Considering the many differences between the work environment in India and that of western countries (Jhunjhunwala, 2012), it would be useful to determine if the research findings derived in western countries are applicable to India.

It is hoped that the findings of my research could provide a deeper understanding of the attributes needed for Indian graduate employability among stakeholders in this country, in the context of the differences in the academic and corporate environment vis a vis the western world. In addition, it is anticipated that these findings could better inform Indian business school efforts to make their graduates more employable and employers' capabilities to determine the presence of desired graduate attributes in job candidates.

1.1 Personal Background

I am the owner of a private for-profit business school in Mumbai. With the aim of ensuring the anonymity of the research participants from this institute, I will refer to this as the "Mumbai Business School (MBS)". As a private institute, we depend on student fees to cover our running costs and provide us with the profit we need to help our growth. Hence, I need to find ways to attract greater numbers of students to study for an MBA at our institute. In the current consumer-oriented education economy, one of the major ways my institute can attract students is by providing them with better career outcomes on graduation (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009).

However, it is important to highlight that my motives are not only commercial and much of my interest in the area of student employability is due the experiences I have had over the last couple of decades, which I will elaborate on below.

Being born into a business family and surrounded by businesspeople growing up, I was influenced to want to build my own company. My undergraduate degree was in electronic engineering which developed my understanding of technology. I received an MBA from the J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management in Northwestern University in the United States, which advanced my understanding of global business practices.

After working in the software industry in the US for a couple of years, I came back to India to start up my own software company. In spite of applying concepts and theories from my MBA into this company, it did not do well and had to close down within five years. This made me wonder why the knowledge I received from one of the top business schools in the world did not help me build a successful company.

For a couple of years after this, I was a partner in India's first professional speakers' bureau, which organized seminars and courses for a range of motivational speakers around the country. During the same time, I took part in a spiritual group that met regularly to discuss ways of improving your life along with global philosophy. Many of the people who came for our motivational seminars and spiritual meetings were highly educated but did not know how to deal with their personal and family issues and came to our meetings to learn how to deal with them. This made me wonder why this sort of 'education for life' was not taught to children in schools or colleges so that they graduate already armed with the capabilities to deal with whatever life throws at them.

I've been a voracious reader and have loved learning new things throughout my life. During my growing years, I used to read many books based on history (both fiction and non-fiction), as the subject fascinated me. However, I hated the way I was taught history in school as it basically made us memorize a range of events and dates without attempting to explore the reasons behind the events or create an overall narrative. This made me reflect on why children love to learn new things but dislike being taught in school. Why couldn't the education system encourage the love of learning?

I am on the governing board of 24 colleges in Mumbai, and I have been involved in various initiatives for improving these colleges. I also served on the 'Educational Taskforce' of India's largest industry association, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The main aim of this taskforce was to help colleges in India produce graduates with skills and knowledge needed by industry employers. My position allowed me to facilitate collaboration between the Deans of our 24 colleges and the CII taskforce. However, in spite of efforts on both sides, there is still a significant gap between the efforts of colleges to produce employable graduates and the satisfaction levels of the employers who hire them. This made me wonder if it was possible to create an education system from the ground up that created industry ready graduates.

Combining the above four insights, I decided that my life's goal would be to help create an education system that taught students in an engaging manner on how to be successful in both their professional and personal lives. Being an entrepreneur, I chose to build my own institutions to do this, instead of joining an existing institution and trying to change it. Hence, I founded an education company which aims to build and run private employability-focused colleges around India. Since I have an affinity for the world of business, I decided that my first institution would be a business school which itself incorporated best practices of the corporate world within its operations.

MBS was founded in 2010, with the expressed purpose of building employable MBA students. Since then my private college group has expanded to add a Media School, an online courses platform and a recruitment services company. Aside from an MBA, our group offers around 14 short and long-term courses in areas as diverse as media, real estate management, banking, digital marketing, event management and others. We currently have around 2000 students who take these courses every year.

It will be useful to highlight the reasons why I have a recruitment services company in my group. Many private colleges in India are expected to proactively

set up job interviews for their graduate students and help get them placed in job roles with a good salary. In fact, many students ask college admissions staff what the college's past student placement records have been, along with average salaries offered, when they make their decisions on which institute to join (Shenoy & Aithal, 2016). This is in contrast to the practice of many universities in the western countries which have career services departments that support students in their job searches, but do not proactively hand hold them or setup job interviews for them (Davis & Binder, 2016). My recruitment services company is a separate profit centre that places students from my colleges and from other colleges outside my group (for a fee) in a range of companies. The advantage with this model is that it can build deeper relationships with corporate employers as it has a much wider pool of students to offer beyond the 2000 or so studying in my colleges and can provide qualified job candidates for them through the year, and not just when students graduate in the month of March of every year. These close employer relationships also allow us to get deeper insights into the graduate attributes and industry knowledge needed by our students to get high paying jobs and enables us to proactively make changes in our curriculum every year.

1.2 Educational Model in Mumbai Business School

Due to my past experience, I was aware that an individual's attitudes and skills could be a greater predictor of their success in the workplace than their industry domain knowledge. Although my understanding of student employability was based on anecdotal evidence and conversations, I started looking for ways that we could build both soft skills and hard skills of our MBA students. As per my initial understanding, hard skills are considered to be defined, measurable abilities like software programming skills or financial analytic abilities. Soft skills refer to a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities like team working, leadership and self-motivation (Laker & Powell, 2011). My initial understanding of these terms has changed as will be described in the Literature Review.

With an aim of developing employable MBA graduates, MBS incorporated an employability framework called the Corporate Readiness Score (CRS), which measured the student on the six attributes that were determined to be desired by employers. CRS is divided into three measures of “attitude”, two measures of “skills” and one of “knowledge”. The attribute of Attitude measures professionalism, team working ability and pro-activeness; Skills measures communication skills and critical thinking and Knowledge measures industry domain knowledge.

My EdD studies have shown me in hindsight that the development of our CRS was not based on validated research. The six attributes we chose to measure were based on my conversations with around 30 employers who hired our MBA graduates. Each was asked the question as to what attributes we need to develop in our students to make them more industry ready. These six were the ones that were most frequently cited. They were categorized as “Attitude” or “Skill” based on my understanding (at that time) of attributes that were innate within the student and attributes that could be developed through our training respectively. A student’s domain knowledge was categorized under “Knowledge”. The tests and parameters we used to measure our students’ attitudes and skills were developed by a consulting firm that developed assessments for companies in India.

At MBS each student’s CRS was assessed every semester, to produce four measures over the two-year period of MBA study. Each attribute of the CRS was measured on a scale of 1 to 10, which 10 being the highest level. Table 1 below outlines the structure of the Corporate Readiness Score.

Table 1 – Corporate Readiness Score Structure

Main Classification	Sub-Classification
Attitude	Professionalism
	Team working ability
	Pro-activeness

Skills	Communication skills
	Critical thinking
Knowledge	Industry domain knowledge

The methods we used to measure each attribute varied. A student's classroom attendance and punctuality in submitting assignments was tracked and converted into their "professionalism" score. At the end of every group project, each student was asked to categorize the contribution of each of the other students in their group via a forced ranking. The average of each student's ranking in each project was normalized into their "team working" score. Faculty members tracked the number of times each student asked a question in class or took part in extra-curricular activities. This contributed to their "Proactiveness score". We measured a student's "communication skills" via IELTS English Language tests. Every student's project or written assignment is scored on the level of critical thinking used. The average of the critical thinking marks across all a student's assignments in the semester formed their "critical thinking" score. Their "knowledge" was scored through their performance in our semester end exams. As can be seen, our CRS system primarily assessed students on their behaviour across the six parameters rather than depending on standardized psychometric tests. The reason for this was that we felt it facilitated changes in the student's behaviour to make them more employable. As the student viewed their performance through these scores periodically, they would make changes in their behaviour to improve them, for example, ensuring that their assignments are submitted on time to improve their "Professionalism" score.

Many of the employers who have seen MBS' CRS system have verbally appreciated the fact that it is attempting to create a framework that builds and assesses students on attributes related to their employability. It is possible that these Indian employers' understanding of employability assessment frameworks used in other countries is limited. Hence, their appreciation may stem from their belief that any attempt made by a business school to create employable graduates via assessment of their graduate attributes is better than the

conventional exam-based methods adopted by other institutes, which only test students' domain knowledge.

The recruitment services company, which is part of our group, oversees the testing and recording of our CRS for two reasons. The first is that having an external agency assess the CRS data collected by faculty ensures better quality control. Another reason is that the recruitment services company would be in closer touch with employers and would better be able to give feedback to MBS' students on how they are performing vis a vis employer expectations. As this company is charged with the responsibility of placing our students on graduation, they are also able to help any student who scores low on one of the CRS parameters through counselling. Most of this counselling encourages the student to make stronger efforts to improve their communication skills, professionalism, pro-activeness and teamworking abilities. Feedback on a student's domain knowledge is within the purview of our faculty. Additionally, broader feedback on our students' performance over each semester is shared with our faculty, who can make changes in their subject curriculum or teaching if needed.

MBS' curriculum includes a range of activities to enhance its students' graduate attributes, which would enable them to achieve higher Corporate Readiness Scores as they progressed within their course. These activities include getting students involved in live projects with companies and non-profit organizations, where they work in small groups aided by an industry mentor on a real problem faced by a specific organization to formulate an implementable solution. Projects like these allow students to build their team working abilities and critical thinking along with having the opportunity to better understand their learned domain knowledge by applying it in a practical setting. Students also take part in workshops aimed at improving their professionalism, pro-activeness and team working. These workshops include those on mindfulness, building an internal locus of control, growth mindset and corporate etiquette training. Students are also encouraged to reflect on their growth by giving them an industry mentor who communicates or meets them once or twice a month.

The purpose of the CRS is to help students become aware of the graduate attributes they need to develop to build their employability, and the ability to track their own progress in the development of these attributes as they progress through their course. In addition, students are informed that their scores will be shared with the employers who come to our college to hire them. This creates a transparent system where employers are made aware of the actual graduate attributes the student possesses instead of what they can just determine from the job interview process. Employers feel that the risk of hiring the wrong candidate for the job is reduced as they have a deeper insight into the candidate's capabilities. On the other hand, students know that they need to make an effort to improve themselves on these graduate attributes, as a low CRS score on any of these parameters could impact their job prospects. Through the CRS assessment system, a transparent measure has been created that can be understood and worked on by all stakeholders, i.e. employers, students and faculty in the employment process.

It would be important to note that the terminology used for attitudes and skills above are not as properly defined as they are in academic research. These terms have been applied as they are understood and used by corporate executives in Indian industry. As my research has developed, it may be prudent to refine these terms to align more with the definitions of the specific graduate attributes they are assessing to enable us to be more congruent with the terminology used in global practice. However, as corporate employers are the primary target for Corporate Readiness Score measures, the terminology they are comfortable using would have to be emphasized over terms which are more definitionally accurate, to ensure there is no confusion in the employer's mind.

When the MBA students graduate, they are handed over to the executives of MBS' group recruitment services company to proactively help them get placed in the appropriate companies. This process includes helping students write their Curriculum Vitae, scheduling job interviews with suitable companies and managing the process until the student gets a job offer letter from a chosen

company. The reasons for this active involvement in a student's placement process by Indian business schools are due to the high level of competition prevalent in the private business school market for students. The proportion of graduating students placed is often considered an indicator of the quality of education provided by the institute and is one of the key considerations potential students look at before choosing to join the institute. Institutions usually show details of their past placement records to potential students who are seeking admission.

Hence, it is essential that our recruitment services company is able to successfully place as large a proportion of our students in as suitable jobs as possible. The strategy followed by this recruitment firm is placing the 'right' student for the 'right' job. This means that all students are not sent for all job interviews on offer. A student's CRS is matched with our understanding of the sort of company that this would be most appropriate for. For example, a student with a high level of communication skills and pro-activeness may be more suitable for a sales role, while a student with higher levels of critical thinking and domain knowledge might be more suitable for the role of an analyst. This is also matched with the specific industry a student would like to work in. Students with higher levels of CRS overall may be sent to more prestigious companies where the competition to get a job is higher, while those with lower levels of CRS may be sent to smaller companies which are less selective about who they hire at entry level. An advantage of this system is that students are made aware that their job prospects are based on their CRS, which is a result of their own efforts to improve their employability while they were studying at MBS, which shifts the onus of their success on getting a prestigious job on them rather than on the institute. Another advantage of this system is that employers are able to hire the student who is most suitable for the job on offer based on criteria they understand, which should translate into better success on the job and higher retention rates.

The question arises on how to verify that the system outlined above translates into better performance on the job and higher retention rates of MBS' students

compared to students who graduate from other colleges. A possible way to do this is to perform a longitudinal study over a 3-year period, which compares the performance of a sample MBS' graduates with those from other colleges in the job roles across a range of companies. However, a large proportion of graduates move into new jobs within three years of starting their first one (Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng & Kuron, 2012), also companies have different cultures where one may automatically provide career advancement for new employees quickly while another may not. There is also the issue of expecting a significant sample size of companies to be willing to cooperate over an extended three-year period to measure the job performance of their employees just to take part in our study, not to forget the possible ethical concerns. Hence, a rigorous analysis that verifies the career outcomes of MBS' students over a longer period may be difficult to execute.

Keeping the above considerations in mind, the methods that MBS uses to determine if its graduates are performing better in their jobs than others, is by conducting regular informal surveys among employers asking about their satisfaction levels with the quality of our graduates in comparison with others. Employer feedback on these surveys are relatively subjective, however the belief is that it is better to understand their individual perceptions rather than have no employer data with which to inform our improvement efforts. Tracking is also done on the quality (in terms of brand name in the industry) of the sort of companies that proactively come to our campus to recruit students to determine if there is an improvement. The job profiles and the salaries that have been offered to our students over the years have also been tracked. Over the years we have seen an improvement in the entry level salaries offered our students and also seen more prestigious companies offer jobs to them.

I am well aware that these methods of assessing how effective MBS' education system is in creating employable graduates may not be considered rigorous by the standards of research practitioners. However, I believe that the knowledge and research capabilities I have gained as a consequence of doing my EdD course

and writing this thesis, should enable me to critically analyse this assessment process and make changes where appropriate to create a more exacting one.

Although MBS' methods of determining how successful its graduates are in their job roles are informal, as mentioned above, there has been a large proportion of positive feedback from the employers who have hired its students. Many of their comments revolve around the fact that MBS students tend to possess a better "attitude" than students of other business schools. Although employers' informal use of the term "attitude" could point to their satisfaction with any number of graduate attributes possessed by our students like their conscientiousness, confidence or team working abilities among others, this feedback has been useful in indicating that MBS' education system may produce better career outcomes for its graduates.

In spite of the positive feedback outlined above, I was aware that our methods of enhancing our students' employability were based on my personal experience and a possibly unempirical method of adopting practices I have seen being used in companies in India. My work on this thesis has made me aware that MBS' CRS framework needs to be reviewed to ensure it complies with the more rigorous standards I have discovered during my research. This is one of the ways that my findings in this thesis will have implications for my professional practice, going forward.

In addition, the fact that employers cited the importance of "attitude" more frequently than other attributes in our graduates, informed the initial direction of my research which focussed on the role of non-cognitive attributes in graduate employability, with a specific focus on self-concepts like self-efficacy, rather than exploring the role of hard skills in this area.

1.3 The wider interest in graduate employability

The concern expressed about graduate employability is not unique to India. Employers worldwide appear to be causing higher education to examine their

strategies and outcomes for their graduates (Wilton, 2014; Belt, Drake & Chapman, 2010; Cai, 2013). This has ignited significant debate on student employability in countries like the UK, USA and Australia among others (Tomlinson, 2012, Cavanagh et al, 2015; Clarke, 2018). One of the key issues that these debates raise is the importance of a student's soft skills in their employability and how these seem to be lacking in many graduates, according to many employers (Archer & Davidson, 2008). Some models have suggested that factors like age, sex, geographical origin, relationships to work etc. play a role in student employability (Jackson, 2014). Other models refer to the specific soft skills that contribute to a graduates employability, like understanding & self-efficacy (Yorke & Knight, 2004) or willingness to learn and imagination (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). This leads to debate about whose responsibility it is to develop these soft skills, how they can best be developed and which soft skills are considered to be more useful than others (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Based on this, the question arises as to whether the primary responsibility of the employability of graduates lies with employers or universities. It is hoped that my research will contribute to the knowledge in this area.

1.4 Purpose of my research

As discussed, I have been of the opinion that MBS has been relatively successful in its attempts to graduate employable MBA students. However, I was consciously aware that this opinion has been based on an unempirical analysis in two areas. The first being that we determined through a very rough exploration of other business schools in Mumbai that a large percentage of our MBA graduates have been placed in jobs with a mostly higher level of salary than a majority of MBA students of these other colleges. The second being that we received positive feedback about the quality of our students from employers in written and verbal communication to us.

If we compare the informal signals we have received above with the statistic that 77% of Indian MBA graduates are considered unemployable by recruiters (Merittrac, 2012), it would seem that MBS has been successful in its methodology

of creating employable MBA graduates. However, the knowledge I have developed on this EdD program made me realize that I cannot assume that the higher levels of employability of our MBA graduates were directly caused by the methods adopted by MBS.

Therefore, I felt that our methods would benefit from a deeper level of research into the domain of student employability and the role of student personal attributes in enhancing their employability. There are many suggested ways that Indian HEIs can enhance their students' employability (Rao, 2014). However, it would be important to identify the specific aspects that would have the greatest measure of influence on augmenting student employability. Additionally, as I was looking for insights that I can apply to my own professional practice, I felt that doing research on my own business school for the purposes of this thesis would be the most appropriate.

A major point to highlight here is that a vast majority of Indian MBA students are admitted into business schools straight after finishing their undergraduate degree, without getting any work experience between the two degrees (Dey, Cavalho & Cornelio, 2014). This is a different case compared to MBA students from western countries who typically have at least 2-3 years' work experience between their undergraduate degree and their admission into an MBA program (Yeaple, Johnston & Whittingham, 2010). A key reason for this is that many Indian students consider acquiring an MBA degree as the capstone of their academic career, after which they join the world of work (Nair & Ghosh, 2006). This means that a majority of Indian MBA graduates enter the world of work for the very first time after finishing their MBA and may not have the requisite level of graduate attributes desired by employers due to their lack of relevant work experience. Part time MBAs, which cater for executives with work experience, are becoming more popular in India. However, the focus of my research is on fresh graduate employability, therefore executives doing part time MBAs are outside the scope of this thesis.

Hence, if my institute is able to ensure our students are more employable on graduation than the students of other institutions, it is possible that they may get better career outcomes, which could allow us to attract more students. This is supported by research that says that the main motivators for Indian students to join an MBA program are to make themselves employable (Nyaribo, Prakash & Edward, 2012). There is a perception among many Indian students that possessing an MBA will give them better job opportunities than just having an undergraduate degree (Nair & Ghosh, 2006).

The above may explain my personal interest in the area of graduate attributes as they relate to student employability. In addition to supporting my own professional practice, this research has the potential to inform the ongoing debate about where to place emphasis on employability skills development in HEIs. Hence, I believe the thesis research I have conducted to be able to suggest ways that Indian institutes can create more employable students.

I have outlined the need for Indian business schools to make their students more employable and the efforts they have made to facilitate this. I have also suggested that in spite of these efforts, a majority of employers still find that fresh graduates do not have the job skills they look for.

This thesis investigates deeper into this dichotomy between Indian business school efforts and employer perceptions of lower levels of graduate employability by examining the role of student attributes in this area. Research is conducted through an interpretive phenomenological analysis of the experiences of students, faculty and employers connected to my business school in relation to student employability. It is hoped that the findings from this research could have implications for professional practice among Indian business schools and more broadly enhance understanding of the perceptions of stakeholders about the nature of employability and the role of personal attributes.

For my own professional practice, the findings of this research would enable me to add more rigor to the student employability enhancing activities being done at

MBS by incorporating the inputs derived from literature and my research participants.

The rest of this thesis is structured into six sections that cover a literature review that leads to development of my primary research question, the methodology and methods used for my research, the findings derived from my research with a discussion of these findings and a final conclusion.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter develops the path starting with the concept of employability and ending with the primary research question I have explored in my thesis. I will start by exploring the concept of employability and will explain the specific focus I am taking on this topic. I will then move to understanding the perspectives of three key stakeholder groups on this issue, i.e. academics, students and industry, as they could be considered to have the deepest personal experience of employability. Students' experiences cover attempts to get themselves employable, faculty's experience their own efforts to make the students employable and employers experience the result of these efforts.

I then move to examining the response of universities to enhance student employability. Afterwards I explore the role of graduate attributes in student employability and narrow my focus to the attribute of self-efficacy. Finally, I explore the role of self-efficacy in employability and will end with the formulation of my primary research question.

2.1 Exploring employability

Employability is a contested concept that has changed over the years, with stakeholders having a range of views about what it is and how it can be developed. However, an appropriate definition for the term would be needed for the purposes of this thesis.

Deriving a simple definition solely from industry which pertains to the set of generic skills and behavioural characteristics that are essential for an individual to secure employment and progress in the workplace (Belt, Drake & Chapman, 2010) would be too simplistic. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon of employability may be warranted.

Over the last 60 years or so, researchers have explored the concept of employability using various lenses, possibly driven by the economic

environment prevalent and the needs of recruiting companies in the United States and Western Europe during the time their research was conducted. Forrier and Sels (2003) outline a history of the research into employability starting from the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s, the labour market was tight with low unemployment. There was a need to get more of the underprivileged unemployed into jobs, hence employability research focused on ways of building their attitudes and self-image to gain employment. In the 1970s unemployment levels increased, so research shifted to the knowledge and skills needed by individuals to gain and retain a job. The focus in the 1980s shifted to business strategy and ways that companies can enable their existing staff to develop the skills and knowledge needed to be flexible enough to be deployed as corporate needs changed. In the 1990s, job security greatly reduced, and lifetime employment with a sole employer became a thing of the past. Hence, much of the research since then has been on ways that individuals can develop the capabilities to be gainfully employed in various job roles as their career progresses.

There could be some debate on the applicability of the various lenses used above in countries like India, whose economic development does not mirror that of the western world. Additionally, it may not be appropriate to have a definition of employability that shifts as per the changes in the broader economic environment. Hence, there is a need to identify a definition of employability that is more applicable for the purposes of this thesis.

A widely cited definition of employability is given by Hillage and Pollard (1998), who say that it is the ability of the individual to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required. Expanding on this definition, they state that an individual's employability is based on:

1. Possessed assets (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and how these assets are used and deployed in the labour market (reflecting career management skills, job search skills, labour market information and personal adaptability)

2. The way these possessed assets are presented to employers (for instance, in applications, CVs, personal and aesthetic presentations)
3. The context of their deployment and in which the individual works (both the supply and demand for skills and jobs and wider individual circumstances)

This lens on employability addresses the employability attributes of the individual, how visible these attributes are to the employer and the demand for these attributes in the job market. This definition may not be suitable for the purposes of this thesis which focusses on university efforts to make their students employable, as the job market environment is not within their control.

Another possible definition comes from Harvey (2001), who categorizes the five dimensions through which the concept of employability can be viewed. These consist of:

1. Job type: The ability to get fulfilling work that requires graduate level skills and abilities
2. Timing: The ability to get a job within a specific time after graduation
3. Attributes: The ability to demonstrate the requisite skills for a specific job role on being hired.
4. Ongoing learning: The ability to keep learning even after graduation
5. Employability skills: The possession of basic core skills desired by a wide range of employers for various job roles.

The first three dimensions outlined above focus on the short-term capability of the individual to get a specific job at a specific time, or with a specific employer. The last two, on the other hand, address the issue of the individual having a range of jobs over the lifetime of their career.

If employability is viewed through the lens of life time employment, a successful career could be defined as having and obtaining the appropriate abilities to be continuously employable in the internal (where a company looks to existing employees fill an open position) and external (where a company hires outside candidates to fill an open position) labour market during one's working life (Forrier & Sels, 2003). This can be further expanded, by distinguishing between the ability to get a job versus actually being employed. The former depends on personal skills and abilities while the latter is dependent on external factors like the state of the economy (Tyman, 2013). In fact, it is possible to be personally employable but be without a job. These issues of long-term employability and dependence on external factors make it difficult to actually measure the level of employability of an individual along the five dimensions outlined earlier.

Based on the above range of contrasting perceptions of employability, it seems that it is difficult to formulate a definition of employability that suits all purposes. It may be more appropriate to apply a definition of employability that is suitable for the context within which it is being examined (Williams et al., 2016). Hence for the purposes of this thesis, it would be useful to focus specifically on the issue of employability as it pertains to fresh college graduates, as this may derive the insights that will be most appropriate for me to apply to my professional practice.

2.2 Employability across job roles

When the perceived levels of student employability across industry sectors are investigated into, there is a certain amount of variation. A survey of Indian employers in various industry sectors (Khare, 2014), determined that industries where possessing technical skills is critical, like information technology and the medical profession, have a greater level of satisfaction with the employability of fresh graduates than industries where soft skills are more important like in banking or consumer products. It is possible that the job role requirements for a

front facing sales role for a retail outlet would be different from that of a computer programmer in a software firm.

My business school (MBS) develops students for white collar jobs in the services sector and one of the main aims of my thesis is to derive insights I can apply in my professional practice. Hence, I will limit my analysis to white-collar jobs across industries in financial service firms, media, consulting, consumer goods etc. for entry-level roles in marketing, finance, human resources and general management.

A survey of entry level job advertisements of companies in the UK determined that employers had a high demand for “transferable skills” in job candidates (Bennett, 2002). These skills are considered to be those essential to enable the job seeker to work effectively across various job roles in different industries. These include communication skills, initiative and problem-solving ability among others. These attributes are the same as those, which are grouped under the term “soft skills”. This indicates that the terms transferable skills and soft skills can be used interchangeably to describe the same attributes. This is also echoed by Kemp & Seagraves (1995) who say that terms like core skills, core competences, generic skills, personal skills and personal competence can be used interchangeably with the term transferable skills to describe similar attributes.

However, regardless of what term is used for these attributes, it is clear that there is a common set of characteristics, like communication skills and problem-solving ability that is desired by employers for entry-level candidates in a range of non-technical job roles. These become more important in light of current trends where individuals change job roles and industries regularly as they advance through their careers (Hall, 2004). Individuals would need to rely on this same set of transferable skills to succeed in whatever job role they take up.

2.3 Employability for the first job versus the long term

A distinction needs to be made on the question whether an HEI's responsibility is to make their students employable mainly for their first job after graduation or employable over their longer-term careers.

One view is that one of the main purposes of higher education is to prepare the student to do well in the world of work (Yorke & Knight, 2004). However, it is important to realize that this world of jobs is neither homogenous nor stable. People no longer stay in the same job or organization for their full careers. Typically, many of them change jobs every 2-5 years either through their own efforts or due to company changes (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

The concept of "protean careers" (Hall, 2004) has become more commonplace, where the individual, not the organization, needs to determine the course of their own career and reinvent it periodically. Hence, an employable individual in this environment would be someone who can find and get hired in a range of fulfilling jobs through the lifetime of their career (Arthur, 2014). Most of the employability factors that enable a person to successfully navigate a protean career are based more on the transferable skills defined earlier rather than specific skillsets (Hall, 2004).

2.4 Definition of employability for this thesis

With the range of perspectives on employability outlined above, there is still a need for an appropriate definition of the term that is specific to the purposes of this thesis. It is important to note that research choices should take into consideration the personal needs of the researcher as well as the needs of the subject being researched (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2006).

As mentioned above, this thesis is based on the study of a private business school, which is concerned with ways to make its students more employable.

Hence, for the purposes of my thesis, the aspect of employability that I have focused on is exploring the factors that enable a student to develop the capabilities to have a successful career over the long term, which would primarily be their possessed assets like attitude, skills and knowledge.

This preference is primarily due my life's goal, described in the introduction section of this thesis, in which I wish to help create an education system that teaches students in an engaging manner on how to be successful in their professional and personal lives. Student success in their professional lives would indicate the ability to be employable over the long term as their careers progress. Educating students to become productive members of society versus educating them just to gain a good job on graduation is at the heart of the debate on the purpose of the university in the 21st century (Altbach, 1998).

A couple of points should also be addressed. The attributes needed for long-term employability are not at odds with the attributes needed for short-term employability. Rather they are attributes that are needed in addition to the short-term ones but have not been cited by employers as desirable for entry level hiring, for example the ability to manage oneself, capability for continuous learning and innovation (Evers, Rush & Berdrow, 2000). This means that the educational institute needs to make efforts to instil these attributes for long term employability in their students beyond the efforts it puts in to develop them for short term employability. Additionally, due to the increased prevalence of protean careers, graduates tend to change job roles over the long term. Hence, a student cohort that graduates at the same time from a specific educational institute could have widely different career paths over a ten-year period. This makes it extremely challenging for a specific college to track the employability of their graduates over the long-term as there will be no standard parameters for success that can be applied, for example it would be difficult to compare the employability of an investment banker who has changed jobs four times in ten years with that of a social worker who has been promoted repeatedly in a single organization over the same ten-year period. Hence, it may be difficult for an

educational institution to verify with evidence that their efforts to instil the attributes for long-term employability in their students have borne fruit.

In spite of the difficulties explained above, I still believe it is worth building the attributes for long term employability in my college students. Hence, the lens through which I will view employability for the purposes of this thesis, as it applies to my professional practice, is that of an MBA graduate having and obtaining the appropriate capacities for being continuously employable, either within the same company or in the external labour market.

The perspectives of employers, faculty and students, the key stakeholders in MBA graduate employability over the longer term, will now be examined.

2.5 Employers' perspectives

In the decades before the 1990s, companies usually took upon themselves the task of training fresh employees to develop the skills they needed to perform in their entry-level job roles. However, in recent times, companies are cutting their training budgets to reduce operating costs and prefer to hire fresh college graduates who display evidence of possessing these job ready skills (Weber & Korn, 2014). Hence, the views of employers are mostly focused on their own needs of hiring employable college graduates for their entry-level job openings. (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Research on employer perceptions conducted by industry bodies and academia have unveiled a range of requirements most commonly sought by employers globally.

Surveys by employers' organizations in many countries reveal that "soft skills" are the most sought after during the recruitment process. Kaplan's survey (2014) of UK employers revealed a demand for candidates with strong communication skills and a positive attitude. Similarly, the Confederation of British Industry (2017) determined that employers in the UK preferred

candidates with a strong positive attitude, good aptitude for work and finally, general academic ability. Graduate Careers Australia's (2014) survey discovered that the attributes looked for in graduates are interpersonal and communication skills, drive and commitment, critical reasoning, academic results and cultural alignment with organization. LinkedIn's (2016) survey of US employers revealed that they look for communication skills, organizational capabilities, team working ability, punctuality and critical thinking. Finally, the Confederation of Indian Industry's survey (2014) concluded that Indian employers prefer the attributes of integrity and values, result orientation, better aptitude, cultural fitment, teamwork, customer orientation and English communication skills in fresh graduates.

Comparing the main three attributes desired by employers in the UK, USA, Australia and India in the table below reveals that employers' preference for soft skills in graduates is similar across these countries.

Table 2 – Attributes desired by employers in the UK, USA, Australia and India

United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude to work • Aptitude for work • General academic ability
United States of America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Organizational capabilities • Team working ability
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team working ability • Communication skills • Drive
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity and Values • Result Orientation • Better aptitude

Although there seems to be some overlap in the attributes desired by employers across these countries, it is important to note that the specific meaning assigned

to terms like “aptitude” or “organizational capabilities” could vary in the minds of the employers being surveyed. As an example, it could be argued that the integrity, result orientation and better aptitude desired by Indian employers could all be components of the “aptitude for work” desired by UK employers.

However, what is clear from the above surveys is that employers in each of these countries desire entry-level candidates with strong soft skills, with less emphasis on past academic performance. In addition to this desire for soft skills is a concern among a majority of employers that there is a gap between the skills possessed by graduates and the skills needed to perform well in entry level jobs (CBI, 2017; Archer et al., 2008; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

2.6 Students’ perspectives

There have been studies on the perceptions of higher education providers, governments, employers and students on the key attributes that need to be possessed by students when they graduate from college. In fact, the term “graduateness” (Coetzee, 2014) defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a student is expected to possess as a consequence of them possessing a college degree. These include:

1. The ability to research, analyse and present information coherently.
2. Breadth of vision – the ability to continue learning, the ability to relate to a wide range of subjects, a command of a foreign language, a curiosity about other subjects, a breadth of knowledge.
3. Expertise in their chosen field, the ability to achieve a balanced view, an open and flexible mind.
4. A good knowledge of the English language – the ability to write and spell.
5. Impetus to reach a goal in a disciplined manner.

What is interesting is that the capacity to gain or retain employment has not been incorporated within this list. This is a concern, if the focus of higher

education quality assurance systems is more on gradueness than on employability, especially in light of research that show that around 76% of students join a college primarily to advance their careers and get a good job on graduation (Ladd, Reynolds & Selingo, 2014).

In fact, when the perceptions of students about the nature of employability is investigated, it is discovered that a majority see it through the lens of getting a good job on graduation, and how their university can help them do this (Beaumont et al., 2016; Morrison, 2014; Tymon, 2013; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010).

Now that the lens through which students view the concept of employability has been determined, it is prudent to analyse their perceptions on how well they believe their universities help them become employable. A survey queried more than 800 students in UK universities on how well they felt that their college degrees prepared them for the world of work. The results could be considered disconcerting for universities. For example, only 16% of students felt that they were well prepared for the continuous learning needed to enable them to be employable over the long term and only 18% of the students felt that they had been made aware of the links between what they learned in college and what they need to know in the world of work (Glover, Law & Youngman, 2002). Based on the above, even though students join colleges to make themselves more employable, a significant majority does not feel that this has been successfully achieved as a result of their degree. However, it should be noted that this survey was done in 2002. It could be argued that universities have increased their efforts to make their students more employable since then (Clarke, 2018), and a more recent survey of students' perceptions on how well their universities prepared them for jobs could yield a more positive outcome.

Unfortunately, this may not be the case. A more recent study by Cavanagh, Burston, Southcombe & Bartram (2015) on the perceptions of Australian students determined that a majority felt there was a significant gap between what they learned in university and the skills they felt they needed for the world

of work. Although, it must be pointed out that students' perceptions of how well their degree has prepared them for the world of work also vary depending on the specific discipline they have studied. For example, students studying business or computer science felt they had more knowledge about what is needed in the workplace more than those studying history or biological sciences (Yorke, 2004).

When further investigation is undertaken into the specific attributes that students believe will help them become employable, there is a significant alignment with their views and those of employers. The top attributes cited were communication skills and team working ability (Tymon, 2013). However, some students additionally believe that the accent they have when they speak, social fit with employer and reputation of the HEI they've attended will also affect their employability (Morrison, 2014). Again, this is more focused on their concern of what it takes to get a job on graduation.

Exploring how confident students felt in their actual ability to gain employment on graduation, a survey of marine sports science students conducted by Beaumont, Gedye & Richardson, (2016), determined that their confidence that they will get a job decreased year on year as they progressed through their course. The main barriers to employment that they cited were specific to their program, i.e. course location and degree quality; specific to the external environment, i.e. competition from other students and state of the economy and lastly, concerns about their own abilities i.e. their levels of experience, confidence and qualifications.

What seems to be apparent in the above studies is that students' perceptions about employability are focused primarily on their ability to get a job straight after graduation. Developing the attributes that enable them to be employable over the long term, like critical thinking or self-efficacy are not areas of focus for them (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017). They also do not seem to be very confident that their universities have prepared them adequately for the world of work.

2.7 Faculty perspectives

The third set of stakeholders involved in the employability of graduates are the faculty who teach them. A survey of 68 faculty members of 6 engineering colleges in India determined that there is some overlap between the perspectives of HEI faculty and employers on the graduate attributes needed for a student to become employable. As per this survey, the top five attributes cited by each stakeholder group are listed below (Remadevi & Kumar, 2011):

Table 3 – Comparison of faculty and employer perceptions

No.	Faculty Perceptions	Employers Perceptions
1.	Problem solving skills	Integrity
2.	Integrity	Team working skills
3.	Data analysis & interpretation	Problem solving skills
4.	Self-discipline	Understands work instructions from superiors
5.	Self-motivation	Basic computer knowledge

As can be seen above, integrity and problem-solving skills have been cited by both faculty and employers among the top five desired graduate attributes for employability. The majority of other characteristics cited are primarily focussed on personality-based attributes of the student. Only one attribute in each list pertains to a “hard skill”, i.e. data analysis & basic computer knowledge respectively. Additionally, team work has been cited by employers but not by faculty. This could be because much of Indian education requires the student to work by themselves during their coursework (Rath, 2017), as opposed to the typical job environment, where collaboration with colleagues is needed.

The above lists are based on the employability skills needed by fresh engineering graduates in India. Although a vast majority of Indian engineering graduates

aspire for software or core engineering jobs on graduation (Aspiring Minds, 2016), where possessing the relevant hard skills would be considered important, both faculty and employers still cite soft skills as more desirable. Another aspect that could be of interest is that neither group identified communication skills as a significant attribute, in contrast to the perceptions of students in the earlier section, which considered this to be of prime importance. It could be speculated that since this survey was taken in Indian engineering colleges where a majority of their graduates would aim to work in back end roles like programming or designing in industry, a higher competence level in communication skills may not be considered as important as other graduate attributes. This points to the possibility that the specific graduate attributes desired to make a student employable could vary based on the job role aspired for. This aspect will be explored further in a later section of this thesis.

There is significant overlap between the perceptions of employers and faculty of the sort of graduate attributes they deem to be desirable from the viewpoint of graduate employability (Remadevi & Kumar, 2011; El Mansour & Dean, 2016). Faculty and students also agree that communication skills, thinking skills and team working ability are the most important graduate attributes needed for employability (Atfield & Purcell, 2010; Cavanagh et al, 2015; Williams, 1998).

As examined in the previous section, these attributes seem to be ones that are more visible in job interviews and enable a student to get a good job on graduation. Hence, there seems to be a great amount of overlap in the perceptions of faculty and students on the attributes needed for employability, specific to the short-term goal of getting a good job on graduation.

Examination is now needed into the perceptions of faculty on how effective they believe their HEI's curriculum builds their students' employability. Research by Kwok (2004) on faculty perceptions in a university in Canada determined that they felt that their institution gave ample opportunities for students to develop their attributes for becoming employable. They believed that individual and group classroom assignments enabled students to develop their communication

skills, thinking skills and team working abilities sufficiently. The same research also revealed that many faculty members believe that students tend to focus more on mastering the theoretical content of their subjects to enable them to pass exams rather than attempting to build their graduate attributes to make themselves employable. Curriculum enhancements that develop these desired attributes is needed, although there is a concern among faculty that HEI administration is not giving sufficient attention to this aspect (Robinson, Garton & Vaughn, 2007). This is also an issue with Indian colleges as a large number do not have close connections with employers and hence are not able to alter their curricula to make their students more employable (Mehrotra, 2015).

This point is also underlined in an examination of perceptions of the faculty, students and employers of an engineering college in Sri Lanka. They determined that all of them agreed that problem solving, team working ability and self-confidence were the most important attributes for employability (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). As with the previous survey of engineering colleges in India (Remadevi & Kumar, 2011), communication skills do not seem to be ranked as highly as they are with the stakeholders of colleges teaching business or other non-engineering disciplines. Delving further, each group was asked how student employability could be enhanced. Faculty believed that revisions in their curricula and having more industry related lectures would help. Employers felt that investing in training after hiring graduates would help. Only a small percentage of faculty and employers cited having greater collaboration between academia and industry as a major way of enhancing employability. This lack of interest in collaborating between these stakeholder groups could be a concern, as increasing understanding about what employers look for and what faculty can develop in their students would be of great help in efforts to enhance graduate employability (Bruneel, d'Este, & Salter, 2010).

2.8 Comparison of perspectives on employability

Investigating the previous sections that individually examine the perceptions of employers, students and faculty on the concept of employability, a few insights seem to appear. The most prominent one being that all three groups of stakeholders view student employability more through the lens of the student's ability to get a well-paying job straight after graduation than on their performance in the job. Developing the capabilities for long-term employability does not seem to be a focus for a majority of them (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017).

This means that although all three groups agree on the importance of the graduate developing a significant level of soft skills beyond the theoretical knowledge they gain while studying, the type of soft skills they focus on are the ones that signal to the employer during the job interview process that the graduate is employable. These short-term employability oriented soft skills comprise of attributes like strong communication skills, team working ability and a positive attitude (Williams, 1998). Skills that would enhance the graduate's ability to gain employment in various roles as their career progresses, like critical thinking ability or drive for continuous learning, are not highly ranked by all three stakeholder groups.

Differences arise in the perceptions of all three stakeholder groups on how well HEIs prepare students for employment. Many students do not believe that their universities inform them sufficiently about the soft skills needed for employment, nor give them specific training to develop them (Cavanagh et al, 2015). On the other hand, faculty believe that their curriculum provides ample opportunities for students to develop their communication and problem-solving skills. However, they find that students are more interested in studying the theoretical concepts that enable them to pass college exams instead of developing these soft skills (Kwok, 2004).

Both faculty and employers do not believe that university administration takes sufficient efforts to build student employability. This is reflected in many Indian employers' lack of interest in collaborating with universities on this matter and instead focusing their efforts on internal training of fresh hires in their organization (Mehrotra, 2015).

2.9 Defining the capacities needed for employability

The previous sections which examined the perspectives of various stakeholders on the concept of employability, revealed a range of terms used to describe the attributes that make a graduate employable, including soft skills, personality, traits, non-cognitive skills, non-cognitive abilities, character, and socio emotional skills. (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Some researchers have said that focussing only on attributes possessed by the graduate in determining their employability has limited value. Hinchliffe & Jolly (2011) question the notion of “transferable skills” where specific graduate attributes are useful in any job role, as they believe that the value of these attributes depend on the context of the job role. They suggest a model of “Graduate Identity” which encompasses the student’s values, engagement, intellect and performance in relation to the job role they are applying for. Morley (2007) also argues that evaluation of the employability skills of graduates by employers is non-transparent and subjective, which could lead to a bias towards elitism.

It should be mentioned that this skill focussed view of graduate employability is being challenged by a broader perspective that views it within the context of the social and work environment surrounding the graduate (Tomlinson, 2012; Collet, Hine & Du Plessis, 2015).

Although these views are valid, one of the purposes of this thesis is to offer recommendations for my professional practice and for universities on ways to enhance student employability. It could be argued that educational institutions' powers are limited to enhancing student attributes for employability and do not extend to changing the behaviour of employers or the context of the job market. Hence, for the purposes of this thesis, focus will be mainly on developing employability attributes.

Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth (2004) outline a model of employability based on graduate attributes which consists of three psycho-social constructs, namely personal adaptability, career identity and social and human capital. Personal adaptability pertains to the individual's ability to be flexible in the face of changing job requirements and conform effectively to suit them. An individual's career identity relates to their self-image about the sort of person they are and the sort of job they believe they are best suited for. As an example, an individual who believes they are well organized may prefer a job role that highlights routine work, like accountancy as opposed to an individual who views themselves as creative and would prefer roles in the media industry. Social capital speaks about the personal networks the individual has that allow them to use their relationships to help them acquire and succeed in new jobs and human capital is the knowledge and skills needed to access the labour markets (Tomlinson, 2017). What is interesting is that Fugate et al.'s (2004) model does not define specific personal attributes that the individual needs to possess, like communication skills or problem-solving ability. These attributes are subsumed within the larger psycho-social constructs and are not identified individually within this model.

Another example is the model developed by Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007), which lists the generic skills needed for employability. These include imagination/creativity, adaptability/flexibility; willingness to learn; independent working/autonomy; working in a team; ability to manage others; ability to work under pressure; good oral communication; communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences, numeracy; attention to detail; time management;

assumption of responsibility and for making decisions; planning, coordinating and organising ability; and ability to use new technologies

When the above views of employability are compared, some interesting differences come to light. Fugate et al. (2004) view employability through the lens of the individual being employable over a long-term protean career. Hence, the need for them to have a career identity that helps them match their capabilities to the right job and also have the social capital to have a network that gives them these job opportunities. These pertain to the individual in relation to the environment they are in. Dacre Pool & Sewell, on the other hand, are concerned with the specific attributes a student needs to possess to gain employment on graduation. The graduates' employability over the longer term or its relation to the social environment they are in have not been addressed in their research.

Another issue that arises is that terms such as traits, characteristics, competencies, abilities and skills are often used interchangeably to describe the same attribute in an individual. Writers in the mid-1990s attempted to define employability competencies themselves used numerous terms (Dalton, 1997). "Competencies" are described as comprising of the "motives, traits and attitudes" that produce a set of desired behaviours of an employee that enable them to perform the job. Further in the same article, competencies are then described as comprising of "skills and abilities" and later as having "attributes, values and perspectives". Three different sets of terms are used interchangeably as constituents of the umbrella term, "competencies", without attempting to distinguish the meaning of each term or explaining why they have been used as a substitute for each other to convey the same meaning, which seems to indicate that the term "traits" would be understood differently in various companies. There does not seem to be an attempt to adopt a specific definition for each term that is widely accepted across industry or academia at that point in time.

Other examples illustrate this issue further. Heckman & Kautz (2012) prefer to use the term "personality traits" in a paper on "soft skills" that assesses the

evidence of how an individual's personality affects their life outcomes. However, they also admit that many terms like "traits, goals, motivations and preferences are used interchangeably with "soft skills" to define the capabilities of an individual that are valued in the labour market. They do not attempt to differentiate among these terms in their paper and state that they are using the catchall term "traits" to avoid confusion in the reader's mind.

"Psycho-social construct" has also been used as a term to describe the same idea in a paper outlining the factors that contribute to an individual's employability (Fugate et al., 2004). However, they do not use other terms like soft skills, characteristics or traits as substitutes for "psycho-social constructs" in this paper.

The term "soft skills" has been defined as a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities like team working and leadership by Laker & Powell (2011) while Jones, Baldi, Phillips & Waikar (2017) define this term as the traits and social skills important in interacting with others, which ignores the intrapersonal aspect of this term.

For the purposes of my research, it may be prudent to identify a single term which can be used to describe the set of attributes pertaining to an individual's employability. Within the higher education sector, the term "graduate attributes" has gained recognition as being among the most appropriate for describing a range of generic skills and competencies expected of graduates.

Graduate attributes include thinking skills, problem solving abilities, curiosity, communication skills, team working skills, capacities to identify and access knowledge; personal attributes like imagination and creativity and values like ethics, integrity and tolerance. These are distinct from discipline specific knowledge and technical skills that are usually acquired within higher education (Hager & Holland, 2007).

Although I decided that graduate attributes was the most appropriate term to use, it will be evident from my research findings that a majority of my research participants were not familiar with the distinctions I have defined among terms like traits, skills, or abilities. and use them interchangeably when describing the graduate attributes that they desire in employable candidates. This mirrors what can be seen from the literature, where there is limited agreement about the precise definitions of terms like traits, skills and competencies even within the individual stakeholder groups of faculty and employers. This may be one of the contributing factors as to why industry and academia are not able to come to common agreement on the nature of the employability they would like to see in graduates, as they are not even able to agree on the precise definition of the terminology used (Harvey, 2001). However, expecting all employers and academia to agree to a common perspective on what makes a student employable may be difficult due to the diversity of employers in terms of size, industry sector and location (Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011).

2.10 Developing student employability

There are many efforts being taken by universities to make their graduates more employable. Although there are examples of this from around the world, the focus will be on the efforts made by UK Universities as there are many more cases of these cited in literature than are those of other countries.

The focus of universities to build student employability can be categorized according to three dimensions (Tomlinson, 2012):

1. The knowledge and skills students need to obtain while in university which will be useful in the job market
2. The useful student credentials that serve as signifiers to employers to help screen prospective graduate job candidates
3. Building student personality attributes and soft skills

Each will be explored below along with examples of initiatives in each area:

2.10.1 Developing knowledge and skills useful in the job market

Some universities have sought to impart more industry-oriented knowledge and skills to their students by creating changes in their curricula based on industry inputs and by enabling students to have real life work experience via internships during the course of their programmes (Yorke & Knight, 2004). For example, the University of Bedfordshire has created a foundation program for its students in leadership, business and innovation in partnership with the Luton Chamber of Commerce (Luton Borough Council, 2012). Many UK universities, for example Anglia Ruskin University and Birmingham City University, offer undergraduate 'Sandwich' degrees, where the student undertakes a 6 to 12 months internship in a real company as part of their program (Ball, 2013). Other examples of this showcased in news media include students at the University of Surrey operating their own radio station, Leicester University students organizing an international entrepreneur conference and Leeds Metropolitan University students running a TV station (Tobin, 2010).

What is interesting in the examples above is that universities seem to be primarily focused on building students' employability skills by immersing them in actual jobs or job-like situations. However, there does not seem to be any homogeneity in these efforts. The job roles and projects to be completed vary based on the supervisor's requirements, which may be less on developing student learning and more on getting the work completed. Many internships are used by companies to use students as a source of low-cost labour and to observe them as potential candidates for employment (Narayanan, Olk & Fukami, 2010).

Much of the above work being done by universities is encouraging. However, without widespread confirmation from employers that these initiatives are improving the quality of their job applicants, it may be difficult to scale across the higher education system.

2.10.2 Student credentials as signifiers of employability

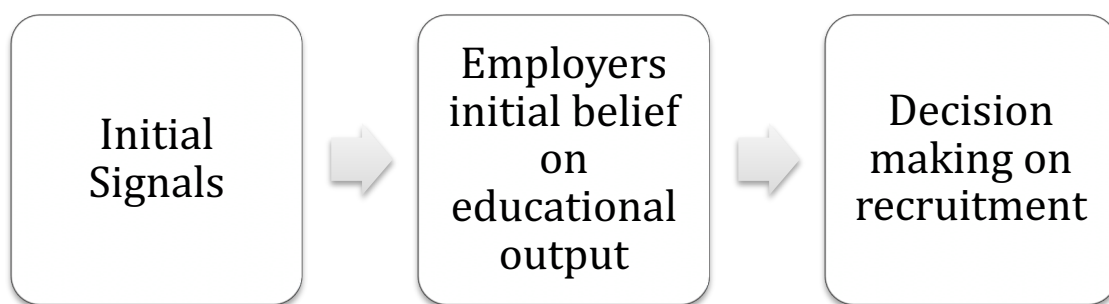
Employers consider hiring a candidate to be an investment decision. Many employers use personal interviews and past academic performance as the main sources of information when making a hiring decision (Wilk and Cappelli, 2003). However, this process gives them a limited amount of information on each candidate, so they often look for externally verifiable “signals” during this hiring process to determine the employability of the candidate (Cai, 2013).

A model that illustrates how employers use signals has been created by Spence (1973) which is a “trial and error” based model, where employer beliefs about the quality of specific types of educational credentials from specific colleges are based on the work output of employees hired from those colleges.

This signalling model can be divided into two stages. The first stage is when the employer has no experience of hiring students with a certain type of educational credential and makes decisions on the employability of these students based on their initial beliefs about the quality of this credential. These beliefs are informed by a range of factors. One of the key factors is the “reputational capital” (Tomlinson, 2012) of the university that the graduate comes from. Employers may hear the views of their industry colleagues where certain universities are considered to produce more employable graduates than others. In addition, employers’ decisions are informed by other factors like traditions and political biases (Teichler, 2009). In some cases, employability assumptions extend to students who have studied in institutions outside the country where the employer resides, where the view is that students develop unique skills, which are relevant to the country in which they have studied (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). Employers sometimes look at other signals in a job applicant’s resume, like their extra-curricular activities to see if there is evidence of their employability (Cole, Rubin, Field & Giles, 2007).

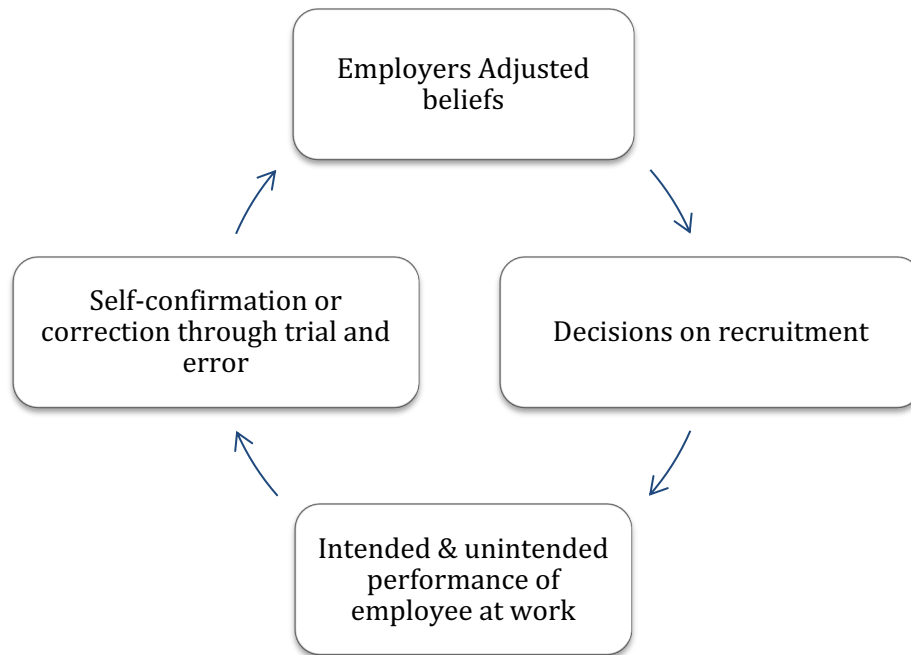
In this first stage, the employer looks for the signals given above and based on their belief about these signals, makes the decision to hire the candidate or not. This is illustrated in Figure 1. below:

Figure 1 - Stage 1 of Signalling Model (Spence, 1973)



The performance of the candidate after getting the job informs the employers' hiring decisions about further candidates who graduate from the same institution, as the assumption would be that these new candidates would have a similar level of employability as the initial candidate. This may affect future decisions that the employer could make on hiring students with similar qualifications. This second stage is illustrated below:

Figure 2 - Stage 2 of Signaling Model (Spence, 1973)



This cycle continues until the employer reaches the third stage where he feels he has been through enough cycles to determine the ‘true’ value of the educational credential and will base future hiring decisions on this.

As discussed earlier, employers desire candidates with strong graduate attributes like adaptability, team working ability, problem solving ability etc. There is an opportunity for universities to develop assessments that signal the candidate possesses these attributes, which could better aid employers’ hiring decisions.

An attempt has been made by the UK government which tasked the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (2013) to create a framework for employability, which outlined the graduate attributes needed for a student to become employable. This framework has been adopted by many universities in the UK. However, this framework is suggestive and not prescriptive, which allowed each

university to interpret it in their own way. Yorke & Knight (2004, p2) gave a reason for this, stating, "The complexity of employability and the variety that exists in curricula in UK higher education mean that no single, ideal, prescription for the embedding of employability can be provided. Embedding has to be undertaken with reference to the curricular context".

The University of Kent (2017) and University of Warwick (2017) lists of the graduate attributes desired for employability in the table below, show examples of how the same framework can be interpreted in different ways.

Table 4 – Comparison of employability skills between University of Kent & University of Warwick

University of Kent	University of Warwick
Numeracy/IT skills	Communication & literacy
Communication skills	Self-management
Team working skills	Team working skills
Research/critical thinking skills	Problem solving
Creativity/problem solving skills	Numeracy skills
Organizational skills	IT skills
Commercial awareness	Business & customer awareness

As seen above, University of Kent considers organizational skills as important which is not reflected in the University of Warwick's list. Conversely, self-management is listed by University of Warwick, but does not appear on University of Kent's list.

Aside from the HEA's framework, there have been attempts by private organizations to popularize micro-credentials, which indicate student competence levels in a range of graduate attributes as signifiers of their employability (Ifenthaler, Bellin-Mularski & Mah, 2016). However, there is not much evidence to show that employers have broadly adopted any single

framework when assessing suitability of a student for employment (Collet, Hine & Du Plessis, 2015).

Considering the range of interpretations of employability skills frameworks by universities and industry, it may be difficult to develop a common understanding of the signals that employers need to look for while determining a candidate's graduate attributes. This limits the range of signals employers can use to determine the employability of a candidate and does not help in reducing hiring errors.

2.10.3 Building personality attributes and soft skills

Earlier, student involvement in extra curricula activities while studying on their course was considered to be for fun and to enhance their university experience. Research has shown that these extra-curricular activities like sport, art and volunteering are significantly correlated to building student personality which leads to making them more employable (Stevenson & Clegg, 2012).

Recognizing this aspect, a number of UK universities have adopted the Higher Education Achievement Report, which provides formal recognition of a student's co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, which can be shown to potential employers (Burgess, 2012). An example of this is Oxford Brookes University (2017) developing the Strategy for Enhancing Student Experience that outlines the various interventions within their curriculum that develops students' graduate attributes.

An issue that arises is that many students get involved in extra-curricular activities mainly through their own initiatives and often find it difficult to balance the time for these activities against their academic responsibilities (Milner, Cousins & McGowan, 2016).

Considering the value of extra-curricular activities in developing students' personality to make them more employable, it could be suggested that more

universities include these activities within the formal structure of their curriculum so that students are encouraged and are given the time to get involved in these sorts of activities. This could help to ensure that employers have a greater level of satisfaction with the employability of fresh graduates (Cranmer, 2006). However, each university's administration needs to determine if the effort and expense of implementing these in their curricula are worth it, if they believe that the purpose of their institution goes beyond just enabling their graduates to get a good job (Altbach, 1998).

2.11 The contribution of soft skills to graduate employability

As given earlier, the three ways that universities can enhance their students' employability is by helping them develop knowledge, which is needed in the job market, enhancing the value of their credentials that signify higher quality to employers and developing student personal attributes (Tomlinson, 2017). However, considering that in surveys globally (Confederation of British Industry, 2017; Graduate Careers Australia, 2014; Confederation of Indian Industry, 2014), a majority of employers most often cite the need for a graduate to possess certain attributes to be considered employable, it seems prudent to focus on the development of these attributes.

Even though some researchers suggest that focussing only on graduate attributes may be insufficient to enhance their employability (Morley, 2007; Hinchcliffe & Jolly, 2011), there is evidence that improving these attributes leads to superior career outcomes. Improving the graduate attributes of a student from the 25th to 75th percentile provides them a wage increase of 10% to 30% by age 30 (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011). There is also evidence showing that student personality and skills predict and cause academic and labour market outcomes (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). However, much of this evidence pertains to academic interventions to improve attributes in the early childhood years rather than interventions during adolescence (Heckman & Kautz, 2013).

As graduate attributes encompass a range of personal characteristics, it would be useful to focus on the ones most relevant to enhancing student employability. Gutman & Schoon (2013) identify eight factors, which contribute to a student's non-cognitive skills. Although their research was based on school children, it could be argued that these factors continue as the child progresses into higher education. These factors with their sub-factors, if applicable, are described in the table below:

Table 5 – Factors contributing to non-cognitive skills (Gutman & Schoon, 2013)

No.	Factor	Sub-factors
1.	Self-Perceptions – Individual's belief in whether or not they can accomplish a specific task	a. Self-concept of ability – Individual's feelings about general past performance
		b. Self-efficacy – Individual's expectation about their performance on a specific task in the future
2.	Motivation – A study of why people think & behave as they do	a. Achievement goal theory - Understanding the reasons why an individual adopts a specific goal
		b. Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation – Whether an individual does a task because it's interesting (intrinsic) or due to external pressures (extrinsic)
		c. Expectancy-value theory – Individual's expectation of the success of a specific task and overall value of doing the task
3.	Perseverance – The steadfastness of mastering a skill or task.	a. Engagement – How someone behaves, thinks and feels towards a certain task
		b. Grit –

		Related to passion to pursue long term goals
4.	Self-control – The ability to resist short term impulses to achieve long term goals	- None
5.	Metacognitive strategies – Efforts to influence one’s learning behaviour	- None
6.	Social competencies – Involving interactions with others	a. Leadership skills - The ability to influence the thoughts, behaviours and feelings of others
		b. Social skills – Learned behaviours that enable a person to interact effectively with others
7.	Resilience and Coping – The first is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and the second refers to a wide set of skills to manage responses to stress	- None
8.	Creativity – The production of novel and useful ideas	- None

Gutman & Schoon say that their use of the term “non-cognitive skills” encompasses a range of attributes, motivations and other personality traits that could also be defined using terms like character skills and life skills. However, as

discussed earlier, we will use the term “graduate attributes” for the purposes of this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to create actionable knowledge for HEIs. Hence, it is important to focus on the graduate attributes that institutes are able to build in their students through their interventions. The way to do this is to determine how malleable (i.e. being improved through interventions) each of the above attributes are and their causality with other attributes (i.e. how much improving each attribute will cause improvements in the other attribute). Research has shown that only “self-efficacy” scores highly on the parameters of malleability and causality (Gutman & Schoon, 2013).

2.12 Exploring the concept of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's description of an individual's self-efficacy points to their belief in their ability to influence events in their lives. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being. People with a strong sense of self-efficacy look at difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered, while those with lower self-efficacy view these same tasks as threats to be avoided.

It should be clarified that self-efficacy is distinct from the colloquial term “confidence”, which refers to a strength of belief but not necessarily what that belief pertains to. For example, an individual can be confident that they will fail at an endeavour. On the other hand, perceived self-efficacy refers to one's agentic capabilities that one can achieve a certain level of attainment in a specific task. This combines an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief (Bandura, 1997). In addition, Dweck (2013) argues that an individual's high level of confidence may get shaken if their ability is tested and found inadequate for a specific task, which may limit their willingness to attempt the task again. Whereas, individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy may view a

failure at a specific task as a challenge which needs to be mastered and attempted again.

Other self-theory related terms like self-belief and self-esteem are considered too colloquial and subjective in their meaning to be used in employability research (Turner, 2014).

There is also a difference in views on whether self-efficacy is a fixed or malleable attribute. Yorke & Knight's (2004) USEM model of employability, which is explored in a further section, considers self-efficacy to be a fixed trait. Research by Gbadamosi, Evans, Richardson & Ridolfo (2015) link student self-efficacy to their career aspirations and is taken to be fixed. On the other hand, Gutman & Schoon (2013) and Bandura (1997), consider self-efficacy as a malleable trait which can be developed.

Research by Dweck (2013) indicates that personality attributes can be developed if the individual adopts a "growth mindset", in which they believe that they can be enhanced through personal efforts. Her research on an individual's belief of where their abilities come from, places individuals on a continuum between a "fixed" mindset and a "growth" mindset. In a fixed mindset, students believe that their abilities, intelligence and talents are inborn and are fixed at a certain level. Students with a growth mindset believe that these attributes can be grown through making efforts to improve them. Research has shown that there is a strong positive correlation between having a growth mindset and having a higher level of self-efficacy (Palazzolo, 2016).

This provides us a link into the area of positive psychology, which is a discipline that uses scientific understanding and study of interventions to determine what enables people to live a fulfilling life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Dweck's research in this discipline has shown connections between having a growth mindset and academic achievement. It may be possible to extend this research to connect building a student's growth mindset or enhancing their self-efficacy to make them more employable.

Based on the above, self-efficacy will be considered as malleable, for the purposes of this thesis. Bandura (2005) lists four sources which can be used to develop an individual's self-efficacy. They are:

1. Mastery experiences – where the individual attempts a difficult task and succeeds through perseverance. This enables them to move on to more complex tasks
2. Social modelling – where the individual observes others with similar capabilities to themselves attempt and succeed at difficult tasks. This encourages them to believe that they can also succeed at these tasks.
3. Verbal persuasion – where people around the individual encourage him or her by making them believe that they have the capabilities to succeed in the task
4. Physiological state – When the individual is in a lower stress and more relaxed state, they can better address the task at hand

Some of the attempts by universities to develop student employability have addressed each of the points above. Mastery experiences can be provided through extra-curricular projects that students take up like the student-run TV station at Leeds Metropolitan University (Tobin, 2010). Additionally, social modelling and verbal persuasion can be developed through a well-run student mentoring program, like the one offered by the University of Cambridge (2017). An increasing number of universities offer training in mindfulness and meditation to their students (Bush, 2011), which would aid in helping them achieve a more relaxed state.

Although the examples cited above could seem to build student self-efficacy as per the suggestions made by Bandura (2010), there does not appear to be a single structured program incorporating all four points offered by any university

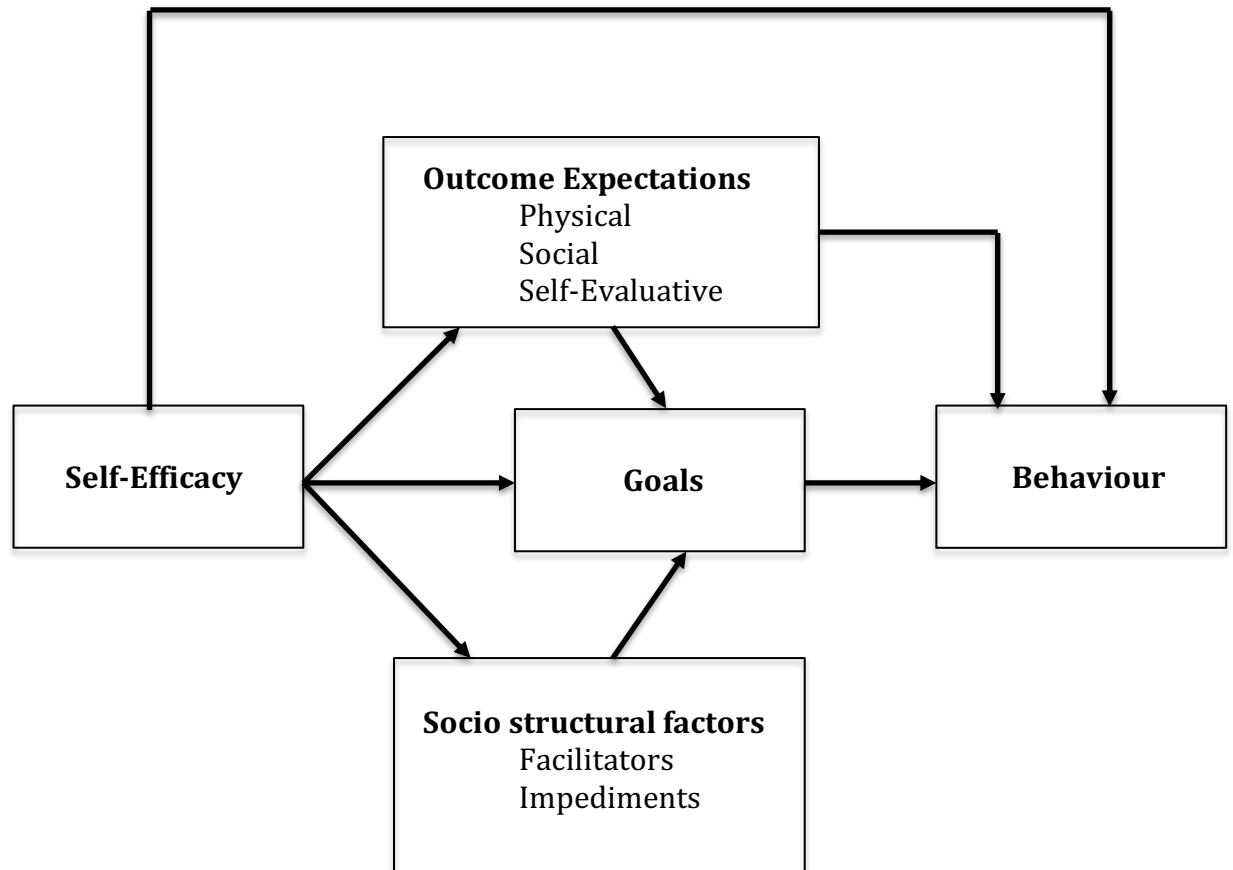
that explicitly states that its goal is to build student self-efficacy. These activities seem to be implemented by different departments with possibly unrelated goals. Creating a structured program to enhance student employability may require a substantial amount of collaboration across university departments to agree on common goals in this regard.

Overdoing the development of a student's self-efficacy is a cause for concern. If the individual's self-efficacy is significantly beyond their actual ability, it could lead to an overestimation of their perceived ability to complete tasks, which could cause a higher risk of failure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). On the other hand, when self-efficacy is significantly lower than actual ability, it discourages growth and skill development. Hence, the optimum level of self-efficacy is slightly above ability; in this situation, people are most encouraged to tackle challenging tasks and gain experience.

2.13 Role of self-efficacy in employability

One of the earliest researchers to identify role of self-efficacy in an individual's employability is Albert Bandura (2000), where he showed that employees with a higher level of self-efficacy tend to succeed more than others in organizations. This was because efficacy beliefs are a key influencer on the goals that employees choose, how much to invest in their endeavour to reach them and how to persevere in the face of difficulties. People with a lower level of self-efficacy may doubt their capabilities in the face of obstacles and give up prematurely or settle for poorer solutions. On the other hand, people with a higher level of self-efficacy would redouble their efforts to master these challenges. This would lead to better outcomes for those with high levels of self-efficacy compared to those with lower levels. The figure below illustrates this causal model of self-efficacy to the attainment of goals through its influence of outcome expectations and how facilitators and impediments are viewed (Bandura, 2000).

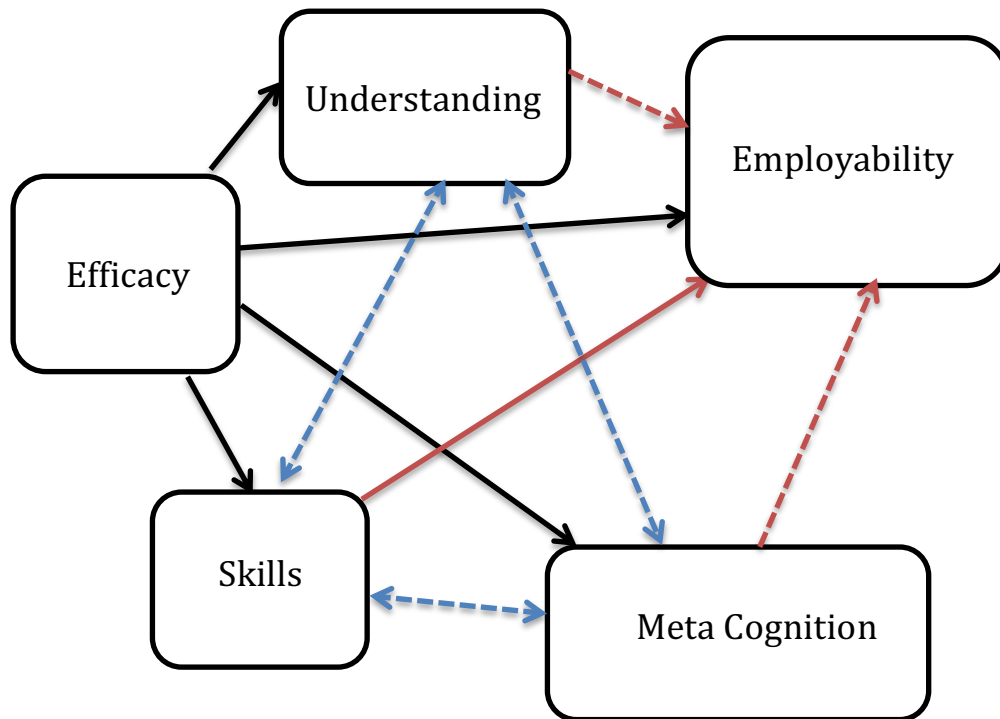
Figure 3 - Causal relationship between self-efficacy, goals and behavior (Bandura, 2000)



Self-efficacy is also a component of the often-cited USEM model of employability developed by Yorke & Knight (2004). USEM is an acronym for the four key attributes of an individual that contribute to his or her employability. They are:

1. Understanding – The knowledge that the individual has of disciplinary subject matter and how organizations work. It is a desired outcome of higher education
2. Skilful practice – Ability to implement with a higher level of competence in the workplace
3. Efficacy beliefs – The self-efficacy reflects on the individual's belief that they can execute the task at hand and also develop themselves further
4. Metacognition - Complements the efficacy beliefs and pertains to the individual's reflection on their own learning and growth

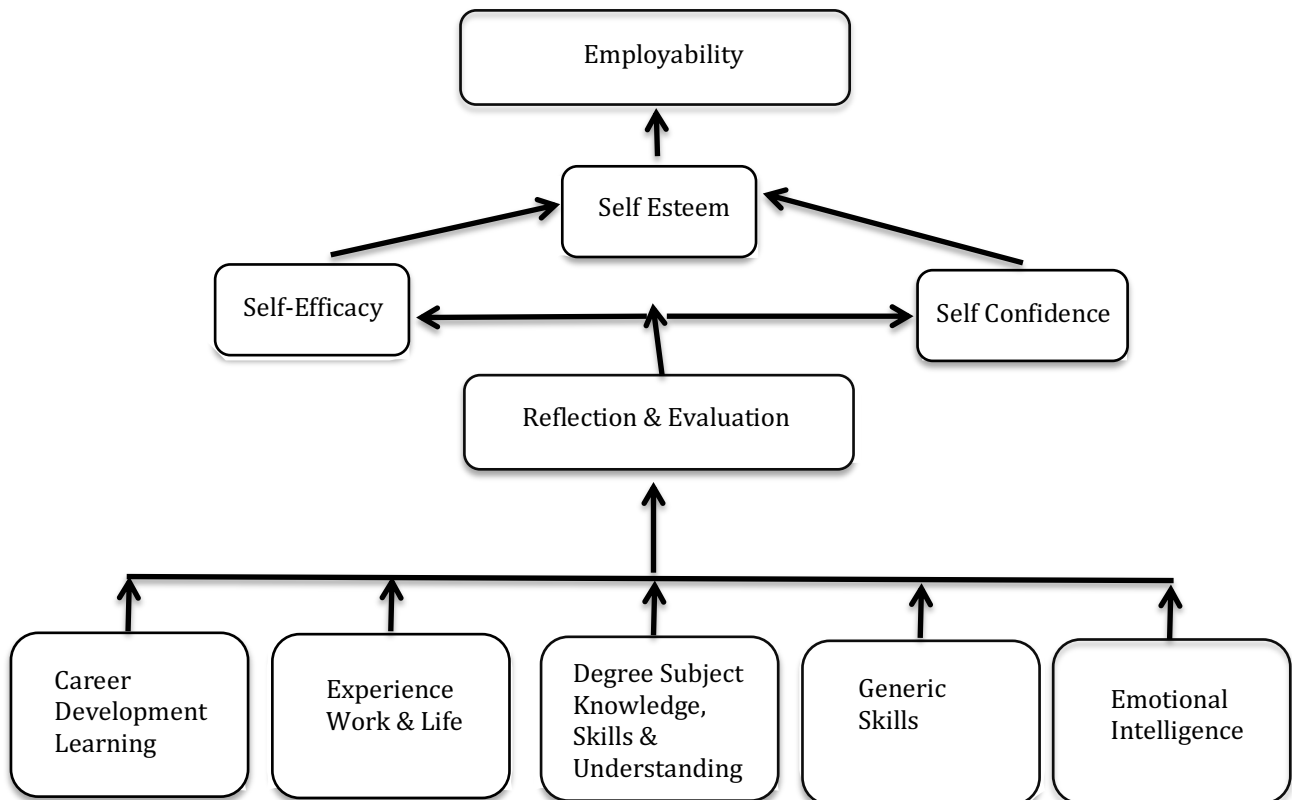
Figure 4 - USEM Model (Yorke & Knight, 2004)



As seen in the earlier Bandura model, a student's efficacy beliefs are a causal factor that enhances the other employability components of understanding, skilful practice and metacognition. Yorke & Knight agree with Bandura's views that malleable self-theories encourage students to view new tasks as opportunities for learning, rather than situations where students need to show their competence or incompetence, which enhances their willingness to develop their capabilities, which leads to them becoming more employable.

Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) believe that the USEM model has a weakness in that it is directed at the academic community who wish to embed employability within their curricula and is not easily understandable by non-experts like students and their parents. They have proposed an alternative model of employability called "CareerEDGE". This is illustrated below:

Figure 5 - CareerEDGE Model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007)



The name “CareerEDGE” is a mnemonic that enables non-experts to remember the bottom five components of this model, which are:

1. Career development & learning: This is about the student having the knowledge they need to develop their careers over the long term, like awareness of what career their personalities are suited for, how to present themselves to potential employers and how to research for new job opportunities.
2. Experience in work and life: This pertains to the incidents, activities and people the individual has been exposed to over the course of their work and lives, which contribute to their current capabilities

3. Degree subject knowledge skills & understanding: This is an outcome of the higher education the individual has received
4. Generic skills: This relates to the graduate attributes that the individual possesses like communication skills, team working ability, problem solving etc.
5. Emotional Intelligence: This is how well the individual manages their own emotions and understands the emotions of others (Goleman, 1996)

The above five components contribute to the individual's reflection and evaluation on how their learning experiences have developed their own employability and what they need to develop themselves further. This leads to the three interrelated self-perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem that are critical for the individual to synthesize the other components of the model. Self-efficacy imparts the belief in the individual that they can execute the job at hand, visible self-confidence allows them to project this competence to the outside world and self-esteem gives them the basic understanding of their own self-worth to make them aspire to do the job.

More recent models like the Graduate Capital Model (Tomlinson, 2017) cite the importance of self-efficacy as a contributor to student employability, in which it enables them to withstand adverse conditions in the pursuit of their career goals.

Self-belief has been shown to have a significant impact on an individual's performance in a given situation (Turner, 2014). This is because self-belief underpins the willingness to take action and have the drive to contribute to a specific task, for example, a student's academic success or his employability. In a survey of 357 students of UK universities, a significant and positive relationship between a student's self-efficacy and their career aspirations has been discovered (Gbadamosi et al., 2015).

As shown, a range of researchers have indicated that there is a significant relationship between a student's self-efficacy and their employability. However, considering there are a range of differences between the work environment in

India & western countries (Jhunjhunwala, 2012), it may be useful to focus on this relationship in the context of student employability in India.

2.14 Developing my research question

As discussed above, there appears to be a significant overlap between the perceptions of HEI faculty and employers on the graduate attributes needed to make a student employable. There is also the fact that a majority of students are looking to get a good job on graduation. In light of this, it is interesting that in spite of efforts taken by HEIs to make their students employable, a sizable percentage of employers are still dissatisfied with the job skills of fresh graduates (Archer et al., 2008, *Aspiring Minds*, 2016; Cai, 2013; Confederation of British Industry, 2017). This seems to suggest that there may be differences in the perceptions between these groups of stakeholders on how these attributes can be developed, which could be explored.

In spite of the cultural differences in the work environment in India and the west (Rajhans, 2016), there seems to be agreement on the importance of the graduate's "soft skills" in their employability (Rao, 2014). Other Indian research reveals a need for graduates with soft skills like communication, problem solving and interpersonal skills (Raman & Koka, 2015; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010; Rizvi & Aggarwal, 2005)

As research has shown, there is a significant relationship between an individual's self-efficacy and their employability (Bandura, 2000; Edwards, 2014). However, much of this research has been done in western nations. However, I have not been able to discover any research showing the link between self-efficacy and employability in India. Considering that there are some differences between the work environment in India and western countries (Jhunjhunwala, 2012), it would be useful to determine the extent to which research findings derived in western countries are applicable to India.

In addition, it may be useful to determine if employers, students and faculty in India are aware of the contribution of self-efficacy to a graduate's employability., Exploring their understanding of this concept and its relationship with graduate employability could help to develop insights that could be useful for Indian colleges to prepare their students for the job market. This leads to the development of my primary research question, "What are the differences in the perceptions of various stakeholders on the role of self-efficacy in a graduate's employability?". The sub-questions outlined below facilitate a deeper examination of this primary question. These are:

1. How do stakeholders determine the employability of fresh graduates?
2. How do stakeholders determine the level of self-efficacy of fresh graduates?
3. What are the factors that impact a student's employability?
4. What are the factors that impact a student's self-efficacy?
5. What are some educational interventions that colleges can do to improve their students' self-efficacy?

Asking these questions with reference to stakeholders in India could offer a useful addition to the knowledge in the area of self-efficacy and employability. This research into their perceptions would require a qualitative approach, which will be outlined in the next chapter.

2.15 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the range of research on the concept of graduate employability along with the perspectives of employers, faculty and students on this issue. It has then examined the key attributes that contribute to graduate employability and the current efforts taken by universities to build them. Focus then shifted to the graduate attribute of self-efficacy and its role in employability, which led to the development of my primary research question.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology and methods chosen to conduct my research, how research participants were selected, how research data was collected and analysed, along with an exploration of the ethical issues and limitations of this research.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Rationale

The primary purpose of my research is to produce findings that add to the current knowledge about graduate employability and which could also be applied in my professional practice (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, it would be important to reiterate some of the aspects about my background and personal goals, as discussed in an earlier section, to provide context to the choice of the methodology I have used for this research.

As described earlier, around 77% of Indian MBA graduates are considered to lack the job skills needed by employers (Merittrac, 2012). MBS, the business school that I founded, was created with the specific goal of producing MBA graduates who were more employable than other business school graduates. My background in engineering and management biased me towards a quantitative reasoning approach, which informed my method of solving the problem of building employable graduates when I created the school. Quantitative reasoning is an approach that favours the use of analysis based on mathematical and statistical models to determine solutions to real world issues (Koedinger & Nathan, 2004). This can also be exemplified by the axiom “What gets measured, gets managed” (Rowley, 2015). In my mind, this meant that if I wanted to find a way to improve my students’ employability, I would need to find quantitative parameters that enabled me to define in an objective manner what exactly an employable graduate was and measure the progress of my students during their time with us to determine the success of our college’s efforts to make them employable.

Using informal research methods to query a range of employers in my network, my team and I implemented a framework called the Corporate Readiness Score (CRS) that measures our students on the six attributes of their personality that were cited as desirable for employment. Specific details of these parameters have already been outlined in an earlier section. Students are assessed with the

CRS framework every semester to determine how these attributes have developed in them as they progress through our MBA program. We felt that the existence of the CRS would give our faculty measures that they can train our students to work towards and students a way to determine how employable they are. Sharing a student's final CRS with employers also added transparency to the process, as they knew how employable a graduate of our college is, based on measures that are aligned with the attributes they look for. I believed that the process outlined above enabled us to create more employable graduates, however I was aware that the only evidence I had on this was the informal positive feedback from the employers who hired our students. As our college group expanded into other disciplines and admitted more students, I felt that our self-created employability model would need added rigor and validation from external sources.

I assumed that universities and governments around the world were already dealing with the issue of student employability, and they had developed widely used models to develop employable graduates. If I could study these models, I would be able to apply insights from these to our own college's employability model and CRS framework. This was the thinking that drove me to base my research within the area of student employability.

I started my literature review using the same quantitative reasoning mindset that had served well in the past. This meant that I initially aimed to find a common set of measurable personal attributes that were widely considered by universities and employers to contribute to the employability of a graduate. I expected that these attributes would have universally accepted definitions as to what they were along with quantitative measures, which determined the degree to which a graduate possessed these attributes. My background in engineering informed my assumption that these universally accepted measures existed, since there already are commonly accepted standards that define competence in specific disciplines, for example software programming languages like JavaScript (Oracle University, 2017) or project management (Project Management Institute, 2017).

However, as described in the literature review section, I discovered that there was no commonly accepted definition for the concept of employability nor was there wide agreement on the attributes that contribute to a graduate's employability. There were also no accepted standards for the terms used to describe these attributes. This meant that I needed to abandon my quantitative approach, as the search for widely accepted measurable standards seemed to be futile. Additionally, doing quantitative research, which sent structured questionnaires to a large number of research participants to derive insights would not be ideal. This is because each participant would likely have their own non-standard personal understanding of the employability terms used in the questionnaire, which may not have resulted in any new insights.

A larger consideration in my choice of research methodology was the primary purpose of my research. As mentioned earlier, my approach would be informed by my need to have insights that I can apply to my professional practice as the owner of a business school focused on building the employability of its students. The most useful insights I could generate from my research would be ways I can make my MBA students more employable. The ideal way to achieve this was to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon of employability in the context of my business school, rather than accumulating data on employability from wide variety of sources. An approach based on qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deep and holistic view of a phenomenon within its own context specific setting through capturing the perceptions of the research subjects within that setting (Gray, 2004). Hence, I decided to adopt a qualitative research methodology for my thesis.

I determined that my qualitative research would be conducted leveraging my position as an insider researcher (Greene, 2014) on research subjects within my own business school, as they are part of a unique employability-oriented environment that was not mirrored in other business schools in India, based on my personal perception, and they would also be the beneficiaries of the insights I derived from my research.

As discussed earlier, my primary research question was “What are the differences in the perceptions of various stakeholders on the role of self-efficacy in a graduate’s employability?” I had to break this up into specific questions that would keep the presumed background and experiences of the research participant in mind. In the case of employers, the basis of my questioning would be their experiences of hiring and working with entry-level employees and what they imagined could be done in colleges. In the case of my students, their experiences would be of studying in our college and what they imagined was required by employers. My faculty has had experience working in both the corporate and academic world, so my questions would solicit their actual experiences of both domains. The specific questions and follow-up questions I had for each stakeholder group has been outlined in Annexure 3 at the end of this document.

A question may arise as to why I did not choose to include the members of the placement company that assesses and places our graduates into jobs, as potential research participants. This is because I felt that the insights derived from the students, faculty and employers connected to my business school, would have application to other business schools that have the same three groups of stakeholders. A majority of other colleges do not use a separate placement company in their graduate employment process, hence deriving insights from these particular stakeholders may not have been applicable to other institutions.

Among the possible approaches to qualitative inquiry, I decided that phenomenology would be the most appropriate. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of the experiences a group of research subjects have of a phenomenon that is usually significant in their lives (Creswell, 2017).

The experience of getting employed and efforts to become employable play a significant role in the lives of the students, faculty and employers of my business school, who were the research subjects I focused on. For my students, their

employment after graduation could arguably be the culmination of their MBA program, and their ability to gain a good job could be of great concern to them. Similarly, for the faculty of a business school that aims to create employable graduates, their success in ensuring their students have the appropriate job skills could be of significant concern to them. Additionally, the employers of entry level talent would want to ensure that the recruits they hire are employable and perform well on the job.

There is also the fact that there is no common agreement on the exact nature of employability or the student attributes that contribute to it. This seems to indicate that deriving research data by exploring the lived experiences stakeholders have via conversations that analyse the essence of their experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) instead of just focusing on the terminology they use to describe it, would produce more meaningful insights. These are the key methods used in a phenomenological approach. Hence, this seemed to be the appropriate approach to take for my research.

However, there is an additional distinction I had to keep in mind. My role in this research is not that of an objective external observer but that of an inside researcher. As discussed earlier, I founded my college with the goal of building more employable graduates. This means that the experiences these stakeholders have of employability were of great interest to me and I hoped to derive insights from my conversations with them that could be applied in my professional practice. It must be kept in mind that the current practices that have been created in my college to promote student employability are derived from my personal interpretations of the conversations I had with employers before I founded this institute. These practices have contributed to the experiences my students and faculty have had of the phenomenon of employability. My current research will derive insights from their perceptions of employability, the development of which have been informed by my own earlier perceptions of employability. This research will create new perceptions in my mind that could change the employability practices in my college, which will again affect the perceptions of the students and faculty of our institute. This ongoing loop of my

perceptions being revised through the perceptions of my research subjects which again could shape further perceptions of my research subjects would create a double hermeneutic (Pitre, Kushner, Raine & Hegadoren, 2013). The methodology I chose had to factor in this reflexive relationship (Cunliffe, 2016) between these stakeholders and me. Hence, I decided that an approach based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) would be suitable for this research endeavour.

Before exploring IPA and its application in my research, it would be useful to explore some of the other qualitative approaches that I had initially considered (Creswell, 2017) and then rejected in favour of IPA. A Narrative approach did not seem appropriate as I was attempting to generate data from a greater range of stakeholders that would give me insights that could be applied to my professional practice. My efforts to build student employability in my college should not be informed by the perceptions of only one research subject. Ethnography was also unsuitable since I was the owner of my college and it would not be practical or ethical for me to sit with a group of my students over a long period to observe them. As a practitioner in the field of education, rather than a full-time researcher, I felt that it did not make sense to develop another theory in the field of employability. It made more sense to see the application of existing theories to the research that I was conducting, causing me to discard a Grounded Theory approach. Hence, I determined that using IPA would be most suitable for my purposes.

3.2 Exploring Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is an approach within phenomenological research methodologies where the researcher makes their own interpretation of their research subjects' perceptions of important lived experiences like a marriage or birth of a child (Smith et al., 2009). It came into prominence in the 1990s and was originally used in the areas of psychology and health sciences. IPA has its theoretical origins in the key ideas of philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger,

and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA rests on the three pillars of phenomenology, hermeneutics and an idiographic approach.

The first pillar, phenomenology, should not be considered to be a philosophical doctrine, but rather a style of thought or an ever-renewed experience having different results (Farina, 2014). Phenomenology, according to Husserl, is concerned with the study and reflection of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness like human judgment, perceptions and emotions. This is distinct from the Cartesian view which classifies the world as sets of defined objects that act and react with each other (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and originally was a method to interpret the writings in biblical and philosophical texts (Shinebourne, 2011). It has broadened to cover questions of general interpretation. The philosopher, Heidegger said that all human beings are hermeneutic as they live in an interpreted world and they make meaning out of it (Bleicher, 2017). In the case of an IPA study, a double hermeneutic is created as the researcher makes their own meaning out of the meaning-making that their research participants are creating out of a lived experience (Clancy, 2013).

The researcher takes an active role in the process of IPA and creates insights into the research participant's perceptions that the participant may not have been aware of (Smith et al., 2009). The last pillar, which is an idiographic approach, concerns itself with the study of the characteristics of a specific phenomenon, and does not attempt to generalize the findings for a larger population (Picione, 2015).

3.3 Overall research design

Although my research had an idiographic focus on the specific experiences of the stakeholders of my business school, I needed to ensure that I could generate a thick description (Freeman, 2014) of their perceptions, such that the context would be more accessible for external readers of my thesis, which would

facilitate a better contribution to the research in employability. Conducting detailed semi-structured interviews with each research participant would enable a sufficiently thick description to be derived (King & Horrocks, 2010).

For an IPA study, Creswell (2017) suggested that interviewing around 4 to 10 research participants would be sufficient to reach data analysis saturation, which is the point where enough data has been collected from a similar category of research participants for a research project to determine themes in the data. Collecting more data at this point is unlikely to generate any additional themes (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

As discussed earlier, for the purposes of my IPA research, my research participants consisted of the MBA students who study at MBS, the faculty who teach them and the employers who hire them.

Conducting 10 interviews of a combined heterogeneous group of these stakeholders would not be useful, as students, faculty and employers would each have different perceptions of employability from the other stakeholders, and this group would not facilitate satisfactory data saturation. Hence, I decided to divide them into three distinct stakeholder groups of students, faculty and employers respectively.

3.3.1 Using interviews

Using interviews is essential to the IPA process. It allows the research participant to tell their story using their own words, aided by a range of questions from the interviewer. This ensures that the data collected is sufficiently thick to facilitate a deep analysis post the interview (Smith et al., 2009). As with other data collection methods, there are pros and cons to using interviews (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). The key advantages are greater control in identification and selection of research subjects along with the ability to build rapport and trust between the researcher and subject, which facilitate greater

depth and context within the process of inquiry. A major disadvantage with using interviews is that the research participant is not able to interact with other research participants, which limits the creation of newer insights that may arise through conversations between them.

I felt that the advantage of this method in bringing out thick discourse through the ability to build rapport and trust between me and the research participant, was key to the IPA approach, hence I chose to use interviews as my preferred data collection process. Hence, I arranged to setup 10 individual interviews with employers, using a process which will be elaborated upon in a later section.

3.3.2. Using focus groups

I realized that conducting individual interviews with the students and faculty in my business school could bring up an ethical conflict. As discussed earlier, I needed to be conscious of my position as an insider researcher within MBS. The main benefit of my insider position was that I had easier access to potential research participants within my institute, however this also brought up the concern that these participants would have an existing relationship with me and their responses to my questions would be biased due to this (Mercer, 2007). The fact that I was the owner of the institute, which gave me the power to have influence on my faculty members' jobs or students' academic experiences, exacerbated the concern that face to face interviews with these participants would limit their willingness to share their true opinions with me and would affect the quality of data that I collected. Hence, I decided that conducting focus groups with my faculty and students respectively would be a better method than individual interviews, to ensure I collected thick data from their responses.

Using focus groups as a data collection method in IPA has been criticised as the presence of multiple voices and the complexity of group interactions make it a little more difficult to infer the phenomenological aspects of each individual's views (Smith et al., 2009), although some argue that focus groups are useful for

IPA as the nature of the interaction may encourage participants to produce more personal accounts (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010).

Therefore, I believed that they would be appropriate for my research, particularly as they mitigated the issue of my inside researcher relationship with the participants. Hence, I decided to set up group discussions with the students and faculty comprising of 4 to 8 participants, as recommended by Creswell (2017).

The primary benefit of using a focus group instead of an individual interview is that research participants would feel a greater level of security with reduced individual pressure as they are in the company of other similar participants. This could encourage them to share their opinions more freely. Another advantage is that focus groups could bring out a greater number of insights from participants as they converse with the others, which stimulates their thoughts (Palmer et al., 2010). Recognizing the possible tension in the use of focus groups in IPA, I tried to ensure that each participant's views were heard, and they felt comfortable enough to share them freely. Additionally, while analysing the data from these focus groups, I tried to ensure I did not assume too much consensus in their individual answers with other members of the group.

3.4 Sampling and recruiting participants

MBS has around 50 first year MBA students and 50 second year MBA students, around 17 faculty members who teach them and has around 120 employers who have hired its MBA graduates over the last 4 years. As outlined above, I decided that setting up 10 individual interviews with employers along with focus groups of up to 8 faculty members and students respectively would be sufficient to reach data saturation for my research. The process I used to identify and gain consent from the required number of participants for my research followed the ethical guidelines outlined by University of Liverpool.

It should be noted that in spite of my position as an insider researcher, I do not have a direct relationship with any of the identified stakeholder groups. I do not personally teach the MBA students. My faculty report to the Dean of my college, who reports to me. All recruiters directly deal with the team in my college student career services department. Hence, it could be perceived that my personal influence on each of these groups is limited. However, to minimize any possibility that these stakeholders felt coerced to volunteer to take part in my research, I used an intermediary who held the position of academic coordinator in my institute, to send out the initial research participation requests via email on my behalf. Emails were sent to the 100 MBA students, 17 faculty and 120 employers who were connected with MBS.

These initial emails explained what my research was about, what would happen if the individual chose to participate and assured them that refusal to take part would not result in any adverse implications. A Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Participant Consent Form (PCF) were also sent with these initial emails. Examples of the PIS & PCF have been attached in Annexure 2.

Selection of my research participants from the stakeholder groups was done on a “first come – first served” basis, where the participants were selected in the order in which their consent emails arrived. Hence, my intermediary informed me about the details of the first 8 MBA students of each year (i.e. students studying in the first year and second year of their MBA respectively), the first 5 faculty members and first 10 recruiters who showed interest in taking part in my research. Any volunteers who agreed to participate once the requisite number of participants had been confirmed were thanked by my intermediary for their interest and respectfully informed that we had already fulfilled the number of required participants, so we would not further need their participation.

All research volunteers were invited to have a telephone call with me, if they wished, to find out more about my research before confirming their agreement

to volunteer. I made it clear to participants via email and with the very few who called me, that my research role was separate from my role as Managing Director of the College, and that I was undertaking the research for an EdD with the University of Liverpool. Research volunteers were then given up to 7 days to email their signed Participant Consent Forms back to me.

It was important to ensure the privacy of my research participants, so I took the following steps. The individual interview with each employer was held in a private location of their choice outside their office, to minimize the possibility that colleagues would be aware that they were taking part in my research. Additionally, the focus group sessions with my students and faculty were held at a location away from the MBS campus. I was also the only person aside from the participants present in the interviews and focus groups. Additionally, I asked all group discussion volunteers at the beginning and end of the meeting not to discuss this meeting outside the group or reveal the names of those who took part in order to respect their privacy.

The interviews with employers were taped via digital voice recorder. The three group discussions, two consisting of up to 7 and 8 MBA student volunteers respectively and one group consisting of 5 of my college faculty, were video recorded. The video recording in the case of group discussions was needed for me to determine the contributions of specific speakers while transcribing these recordings. The data from these interviews and group discussions was analysed and coded using a qualitative data analysis software called NVivo.

3.4.1 Employer profiles

My research intermediary had sent out research participation invitations via email to around 120 senior HR managers whose companies have hired MBA graduates from MBS. It is important to note that a majority of these research invitees do not interview entry-level job candidates themselves during their company hiring process. Junior executives in their companies usually conduct the specific job interviews and hiring assessment tests. Most junior employers tend to be fresh college graduates themselves who are relegated to doing the

routine mechanical work of filtering out undesirable candidates based on specific job descriptions given by their seniors. (Boswell, Roehling, LePine & Moynihan, 2003). They often do not have the experience of working with the employees they hire subsequently, so may not have the personal experience needed for my research purposes.

Based on the above distinction, I chose to interview senior HR managers instead of frontline employers mainly because the former would have a more strategic view of the desirability of hiring and working with employees' vis a vis the employees' perceived self-efficacy. Having a strategic view enabled my research participant to understand his or her company's overall strategy and the roles of their company employees in implementing that strategy. This would mean that they possibly could be more aware of how personal characteristics of their company employees play a part in their abilities to implement company strategy.

The pool of senior HR managers from which I solicited participation were primarily divided into two different groups. The first were experienced HR managers who worked in mid to large companies in Mumbai. The second were owners or senior managers of recruitment firms that specialize in entry job level placements. The former would have the strategic view of their company outlined above. The latter would have experience working with a range of companies and identifying the right sort of entry-level job candidates their client firms would need. I felt that having interview participants from two categories would give me a richer range of responses to my interview questions.

I fixed face-to-face interviews with the first ten HR managers who agreed to participate in my research. The final composition of this group comprised of two owners of small executive recruitment companies, one entrepreneur who sold her large executive recruitment firm and started a small company in another industry, three senior human resource managers at vice-president level of large companies, three mid-level managers in large recruitment firms and one HR consultant who has written a book about recruitment based on their past experience in this area. The majority of these participants were in their 40s or

50s and have had at least 15 to 20 years of professional work experience. They have all had experience recruiting fresh graduates from Indian colleges.

As mentioned earlier, all of these participants work or used to work in companies that have hired MBA graduates from my business school. Hence, most of them know me personally on a professional basis. This may be one of the reasons they readily agreed to participate in my research. However, as mentioned earlier, I did make efforts to tell them at the beginning of my research interview with them that they should view me as an unbiased academic researcher and not in the professional capacity that they know me.

The names of the employers who were my research participants were anonymized into codes that identify the category of participant while hiding their identity. These are illustrated in the following table:

Table 6 – Employer profiles

Employer Code	Gender	Background
R1	Female	Owner of small recruitment firm
R2	Female	Middle manager in recruitment firm
R3	Female	HR Consultant & book author
R4	Male	VP (HR), Public sector finance firm
R5	Male	VP (HR), Private Equity Fund
R6	Male	VP (HR), Multinational Bank
R7	Female	Ex-owner of large recruitment firm
R8	Female	Middle manager in recruitment firm
R9	Female	Middle manager in recruitment firm
R10	Female	Owner of small recruitment firm

An approach based on interpretive phenomenology requires an exploration of the context within which each research subjects interview responses are given. A brief background of each employer has been given below based on their self-introduction during their interviews and my knowledge of the companies they work for.

Employer Code - R1

She has had 18 years of experience working in recruitment. Before co-founding her own firm around four years ago, she worked in a firm specializing in

executive placements for non-profit organizations. Her current firm provides consulting and training to small and mid-size companies on areas of leadership and team management.

Employer Code – R2

She has worked in the human resources space for around 21 years and has hired candidates for a range of industries which include media, financial services, engineering and retail. She started her career working for large companies in media and retail, then ran her own recruitment company for five years, then became a middle manager at a large recruitment firm.

Employer Code – R3

Over the last 21 years, she has worked in various roles in the Human Resources departments of a range of large industrial companies. She recently became an independent consultant and has authored a book on human resources

Employer Code – R4

He has served as the head of Human Resources of a very large government run financial services firm for the last seven years. Prior to this, he has worked in a range of multinational companies in the human resources department.

Employer Code – R5

R5 currently serves as the Chief People Officer for a large Indian Private Equity firm, which focusses on buying and building mid-sized companies. His main role consists of hiring senior talent for the companies within his fund's portfolio. His fund's team is small and mostly he works with only top leadership. Prior to this he has worked in senior HR roles in various large companies across industries in India.

Employer Code – R6

He is the Chief of human resources for one of India's largest private banks. His department is responsible for managing around 33,000 employees across

various branches around India. Prior to this, he has worked in senior HR roles primarily in banks and financial services firms. His experience spans 30 years.

Employer Code – R7

R7 has been a serial entrepreneur. She co-founded a recruitment firm in 1996 which grew to being one of India's largest before she sold it to a multinational recruitment company. Aside from India, she has worked in Hong Kong and the UK. She currently runs a movie production company.

Employer Code – R8

Her 19-year work experience has seen her start in operational roles in companies in India's information technology industry, before moving to the insurance industry and then becoming a middle manager at a mid-sized recruitment firm. This gives her hands-on knowledge of business operations beyond just human resources functions.

Employer Code – R9

She has worked for around 20 years in various human resources roles, primarily in investment banking and commercial banking. Currently she works as a middle manager in a mid-sized recruitment firm that caters to the finance industry.

Employer Code – R10

R10 has worked in the banking industry in various roles prior to her joining her family business which recruits entry level talent for middle to large sized companies. She currently serves as the CEO of this company, which was started by her father, and is in the process of expanding it into other cities in India.

3.4.2 Faculty profiles

My business school is relatively small, so we have a pool of 17 full time faculty members who teach my MBA students, supported by a larger group of visiting faculty. My full-time faculty has had the experience of interacting with my MBA

students on numerous occasions through teaching them a range of subjects and mentoring them as part of our program through the 2 years they are with us. Our visiting faculty may not have as close an understanding of our MBA students' personalities as our full-time faculty, as they often come just to teach a specific subject (sometimes only one subject in the full two years). Hence, I felt that limiting my potential research participant pool to my full-time faculty would enable me to solicit deeper insights based on a better understanding of my MBA students than having a mixed discussion group comprising of full time and part time faculty.

Based on the above, I sent out invitations, via my intermediary, to the 17 full-time faculty members of my business school and setup a group discussion with the first 5 who volunteered to take part. This group consisted of the Dean of my college, two professors who teach finance, one who teaches marketing and one teaching operations.

It will be important to note that our business school has a unique education model that focuses on trying to build graduate attributes via a combination of experiential learning, industry projects and personal mentoring, along with imparting the regular business curriculum. In light of this, most of the faculty have had extensive work experience in the corporate world before joining my business school and have adapted well to our pedagogical methods. Many of them also have a good working relationship directly with me, even though they report to the Dean officially through the organizational structure. It should also be pointed out that the decision-making power to hire and sometimes terminate these faculty members rests with my Dean. I am usually not directly involved in the hiring and firing process of my academic team, so this limits my possible influence on this group.

The table below gives the gender, subjects taught, and years employed in my business school of the faculty who took part in my research.

Table 7 – Faculty profiles

Faculty Code	Gender	Subject Taught	Years Employed in MBS
F1	Female	Finance (Head of Dept)	1
F2	Female	Research Techniques	1
F3	Male	Media	2
F4	Male	Marketing (Head of Dept)	3
F5	Male	Dean of MBS (Marketing specialization)	4

3.4.3 MBA student profiles

My intermediary sent out research participation invitations to 50 students in my college who were studying in their first year of their MBA and to another 50 students studying for the second year of their MBA. The first eight from each group who volunteered to participate in my research were invited to take part in a group discussion.

I held two group discussions, one comprising of 8 first year MBA students and one consisting of 7 second year MBA students. Although I had planned to have 8 students for the second group discussion, one of them dropped out on the day of the discussion itself.

The first year MBA students' group discussion was held in the month of October 2016. These students had joined our college in September 2016 and had sat through just one month of classes before taking part in this group discussion. A large proportion of them had joined our college fresh from their undergraduate institution and had absolutely no prior work experience. They also had minimal MBA education at this time, so their level of knowledge and experience would be very close to Indian undergraduate students.

The second year MBA students' group discussion was held in November. By this time, these students had more than one year of MBA education, along with having the experience of doing a three-month summer internship in a company. Since I already had to compare the perceptions three groups of stakeholders,

adding additional complexity to this analysis by comparing the perceptions of first year and second year MBA students separately before comparing to those of employers and faculty seemed to be unwarranted. Hence, I chose to classify the perceptions of the first- and second-year MBA students under one stakeholder group.

The third table gives the gender of each of the MBA students who took part in my research. The students who were in the first year of their MBA program have been allocated the code “JS (number)” & those in the second year are identified by “SS (number)”. A majority of these students are between 22 and 25 years of age. The table below identifies the gender of each of these students.

Table 8 – Student profiles

Student Code	Gender
JS1	Female
JS2	Female
JS3	Female
JS4	Male
JS5	Male
JS6	Male
JS7	Male
JS8	Male
SS1	Female
SS2	Male
SS3	Male
SS4	Female
SS5	Male
SS6	Male
SS7	Male

3.4.4 My perceptions about research participants

As my methodology is based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the way I have coded my research data and presented my findings have been informed by this approach. Hence, I primarily sought the perceptions my research participants had on the question of a student’s self-efficacy in relation to their first employment on graduation. My data analysis was not based on testing any

specific hypothesis in light of my research participants' answers (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). I also tried to avoid getting my research participants to speculate on issues beyond their personal experiences, so I slightly altered the set of interview questions for each group of participants. For example, I did not ask my MBA students, who have none to a few months work experience, the question of how companies can build the self-efficacy of their employees.

It will also be prudent to reflect on how my position as an insider researcher and owner of MBS could influence my perceptions about the research participants' own perceptions. This can be reflected upon by considering the five different aspects that pertain to the role of being an insider researcher; proximity to the research participants, multiple roles held by the researcher, the internal politics within the organization, ethical aspects and whose voice the researcher chooses to emphasize (Hanson, 2013).

My position as an insider researcher, allowed me to build rapport and trust with the research participants more easily than an outsider researcher could (Kanuha, 2000). I have met the faculty in my institute and many of the employers for operational matters prior to the start of my research. I have also given speeches to our students during various college events and have interacted with a few of them on a one to one basis. This means that a majority of my research participants already had a pre-existing relationship with me when they took part in my research.

Adding to this would be my multiple roles as the owner of the institute along with being an insider researcher. As the owner, much of the information about activities and achievements of my students and employees is brought to my attention, which gives me a holistic view of the organization, which may not have been afforded to an insider researcher who is more junior in their institution's hierarchy. However, I needed to be cognizant of the fact that having prior relationships with the research participants and greater knowledge of the institution's operations could encourage me to not question pre-existing assumptions that could lead to superficial analysis and biased perceptions.

There were a couple of prominent political aspects that could have induced bias in my research. The first was the fact that as the owner of the institute, I had a significant amount of power over my faculty and students. As described earlier, I made efforts to reduce the possible effect of this by using an intermediary to recruit research participation volunteers and also exhorted each participant to view me as a researcher and not the institute's owner for the duration of our group discussion. However, in spite of my efforts it is possible that this power dynamic remained in the minds of my participants, which could have influenced their responses to my questions.

Another political aspect I needed to keep in mind was my own viewpoint on student employability. As mentioned before, creating employable graduates has been one of the key goals of the colleges I have founded, so I have already built a range of perceptions based on my past experiences and research in this area. I needed to be mindful that my underlying perceptions did not bias the way I conducted my interviews or group discussions, nor cause my preconceptions to colour the analysis of the collected data (Teusner, 2015).

I have earlier outlined how ethical concerns were mitigated in the process I used to recruit research participants and to ensure their responses were not coloured due to the power relationship between us. However, a concern did arise on whether my thesis emphasized the voice of my participants or mine (Hanson, 2013). A double hermeneutic interpretation of research participants' responses is a key aspect of the IPA approach (Pitre et al., 2013). This meant that the data collection, analysis and conclusions of this thesis would necessarily contain my own interpretation of the responses made by my research participants based on my own understanding of their context. It was important to ensure that a combination of my participants' accounts and my own phenomenological interpretation created a balanced research output (Smith et al., 2009).

Keeping in mind that my perceptions could possibly be coloured by the five aspects outlined above, my opinion on the contexts in which my research participants shared their accounts are given below.

It is possible that the perceptions of employers would be based on their first-hand experience hiring and working with fresh college graduates. The faculty of my business school has all worked in industry prior to taking up their academic roles. Hence it is possible that their perceptions on this issue would be partly derived from their prior industry work experience and partly from working with our college students to make them employable. The MBA students who took part in my group discussions have mostly not worked in industry, aside from a short summer internship for the seniors. Hence, it is conceivable that their perceptions would be based more on their speculation of how the world of work is and what it takes to succeed there.

3.5 Data collection

The group discussions of both sets of MBA students were held in a room outside the college campus to ensure student privacy. However, to ease my transcription efforts, both these group discussions were video recorded to help me know who said what. I setup a video camera on a tripod stand to film the proceedings. In both groups, I sensed a little initial discomfort that they were being videoed in a discussion where the Managing Director of the institute was present. However, as the discussion progressed, they started to relax and seemed eager to present their views on the research questions. A point to note here is that each student stated his or her views in turn in a disciplined manner, without interrupting someone else who was speaking. Some seemed to want to specifically give answers that covered a different point than what was covered earlier for the same question. I believe that this is similar to the behaviour that is expected from them in regular classroom case study discussions, where if a student makes a point and a few others just say, "I agree", then that is considered intellectually lazy and frowned upon. Each student is expected to come up with points, which are different from what has been brought up earlier. However, I believe this

behaviour helped them to think more deeply about their personal experience, which may have helped to expand their individual responses. This aspect could mitigate the potential negative impact of using a focus group in my IPA research

This is different from my experience with the employer interviews, where they did not know what each other's responses were and hence seemed to give similar answers to a few of the questions.

The faculty group discussion was similarly held in a room outside our campus. This group discussion was filmed using the same video camcorder which was used for the student group discussions. As mentioned earlier, the Dean of my business school was part of this group. I did not feel that having him present in the group would cause a problem as we have a very flat organization structure with minimal hierarchy. I have observed how the Dean and my full-time faculty have interacted with other in the past, and there is a very friendly and collegial power dynamic between them, which allow them to freely share their point of view. I believe this friendly and collegial approach extends to the academic team's relationship with me. I am quite involved in regular academic discussions on curricula and pedagogy with this team, and we share a good relationship, which is based on mutual respect and openness. Hence, I do not believe that the academic team was intimidated by my presence during their group discussion and were able to speak openly.

That said, I could sense a significant degree of emotion in their responses. I believe that this is due to the fact that most of my faculty have been researching and implementing ways to build our students' non-cognitive skills and are quite passionate in these endeavours. Their visible zeal in their discussion was quite heartening to me as the college owner. Although, it was possible that there was also some attempt to "look good" in front of me, their employer. The power dynamic between my faculty and I could have made it difficult for them to separate my role as their employer from my role as an insider researcher, in spite of my asking them to view me as just a researcher for the purposes of this group discussion. As a dispassionate researcher, there was also a concern that

they may not be fully exploring contradictory points of view. The issue of possible “groupthink” (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998) could have arisen where a faculty member who may want to share a different point of view, felt daunted by the overall passionate views of the others in the group. However, I made attempts to solicit opinions from individual faculty that did not agree with the views shared by the majority, through some of the follow up questions I asked to promote discussion. I believe these yielded results as there were dissenting opinions on issues like the commonalities between attributes needed for success in academics and success in the corporate world. This will be explored further in the Findings section of this thesis.

Most of the employer interviews were held in the private cabins of their office or an outside location over a cup of coffee. This facilitated a relaxed environment which was mostly undisturbed by interruptions. The general demeanour of my employer interviewees was friendly and helpful. They mostly seemed eager to share their personal experiences and prescriptive views. All the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. None of these interviewees seemed concerned that the interview was being recorded and I do not feel that they measured their responses because of this. In an effort to make them feel further at ease, at the start of each interview, I told each that their interview transcripts would be available for them to review before I utilized them in my research. However, only one interviewee requested a transcript for review and did not request any alterations after reviewing it.

I believe that I was able to mine a rich source of data due to the candid responses given by most of the employers to my interview questions. For example, a couple of employers were willing to speak on record on ways their organizations’ hiring policies are not able to help them identify employable candidates. A few also gave accounts that reflect mistakes they or their colleagues have made in working with fresh candidates. These will be unpacked more in the Findings section.

Overall, I believe my efforts to ensure participants did not feel coerced to take part in my research and my exhortation to treat me as a plain researcher aided to some extent in making a majority of my research subjects feel at ease and willing to freely share their views. My awareness about the aspects of my position as an insider researcher which could possibly bias my perceptions, was also kept in mind, leading me to try to minimize these biases. I feel that the above two considerations enabled me to facilitate a thick discourse with my research participants and thus extract a rich amount of data for analysis.

3.6 Data analysis

The voice and video files recorded from the interviews and group discussions were copied onto my laptop hard drive into a password protected folder. These files were deleted from the voice recorder and video camcorder used to record them. These files are also backed up on an external hard drive which is kept in a locked drawer in my office. These precautions were kept ensuring a higher level of data security.

The 10 voice and 3 video files were transcribed over a period of one month into MS Word documents which formed the text-based data used for my analysis. These transcribed documents were then imported into a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software called NVivo, which was chosen to help discovery of emergent themes from this data.

Once the transcripts were imported into NVivo, the process of reading and re-reading them to start identifying themes and superordinate themes from the data was initiated (Smith et al., 2009). In NVivo's terminology, themes are identified as "Nodes" which are clustered in groups which represent the superordinate themes. Each transcript was read at least three times and notes were entered against selected quotes from individual research participants which could be coded to develop themes from their discourse. Once coding of each transcript was completed, they were read again to identify similarities or

possible connections among the themes across these transcripts. Clusters of themes started emerging, which were then grouped under superordinate themes (or Nodes). Details of the specific themes that emerged will be explored in the “Findings” chapter of this thesis.

My approach being based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis meant that my investigation would be ideographic, and my findings would incorporate a double hermeneutic interpretation of these stakeholders’ perceptions. This was reflected in how I interpreted the data that I derived from the interviews and group discussions. I initially read each transcript once without making notes or deriving any themes. This enabled me to get an overall sense of the views being expressed by each research participant in the context of my perceptions of their background and mindset, which helped in a double hermeneutic interpretation of the data. After the initial reading, I subsequently re-read each transcript to get deeper into each participant’s world, made notes and identified themes as I progressed through each. After the second reading of each transcript and theme identification was completed, I did a third reading across all transcripts again to determine if there were any themes that I had missed during the first two readings. In a separate document, I clustered the relevant quotes from my research participants under each theme. I then combined themes with commonalities among them under superordinate themes.

Throughout the whole process, I was conscious about how my own experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon of employability was influencing my reading of their perceptions, which facilitated a double hermeneutic interpretation of their views.

3.7 Alternative terms for self-efficacy used by research participants

The term “self-efficacy” is not something I have seen being used much in articles or books that I have read outside my current EdD research work. I also cannot remember any instance when I heard this term being used in regular conversation with my colleagues in industry or academia nor with the students

in my college. This is also reflected in the literature where researchers use an interchangeable range of terms like self-belief and self-confidence (Turner, 2014) to describe similar attributes in an individual. Based on this, it was possible that my research participants would not be familiar with the term “self-efficacy”. Even if they had heard of it, they most likely would not understand it with the same level of distinction that I would have, due to my research in this area.

Hence, before I introduced my questions around self-efficacy with my research participants, I made it a point to explain the term for them in advance, using Albert Bandura’s (2000) definition that self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task.

In spite of giving this definition, many of my research participants used terms related to this basic concept like “self-belief” or “self-confidence”. As I wanted to capture their general perceptions of the concept of self-efficacy, this was acceptable for the purposes of my research (Zulkosky, 2009).

3.8 Alternative terms used for graduate attributes

Like “self-efficacy”, I have not heard or read the term “graduate attributes” being used much outside of my academic research. Hence, it is unlikely that my research participants would have been familiar with the term. Adding to this is Parry’s (1996) assertion that a majority of managers confuse terms like traits, skills and competencies while describing the characteristics that make an individual employable. This is borne out by my interview and group discussion experiences where the three groups of stakeholders quoted traits, competencies and skills interchangeably as aspects of student employability.

My interpretive phenomenological approach to my research means that I am primarily focusing on the experiences and understanding that my research subjects derive from the issues of student employability and their self-efficacy. My purpose was look beyond the way they used terms like traits, skills and competencies interchangeably to explore their narrated experiences of these

attributes in relation to student employability. Hence, I believe that all the traits, characteristics and competencies cited by my research participants can all be categorized under the catchall term of “graduate attributes” for the purposes of my thesis.

3.9 Validity, reliability and ensuring quality

There are four criteria used for assessing the validity of a qualitative research project (Yardley, 2008). These comprise of:

- Sensitivity to context
- Commitment and rigor
- Transparency and coherence
- Impact and importance

I will assess the quality of my own research along these criteria.

I believe that I was sufficiently sensitive to the context in my dual role as an insider researcher and owner of the institute within which I was conducting my research. I made efforts within my research volunteer recruitment process to ensure that these stakeholders did not feel coerced to participate. The phenomenological aspect of my IPA approach was served by ensuring that I quoted excerpts of the participants’ answers from their interviews and group discussions extensively to substantiate the insights derived from the data. I also ensured that the idiographic focus of my IPA approach was sustained by asserting that my research conclusions were specific to the population being researched upon and more research would be needed before suggesting a generalized application of my findings.

Commitment to the IPA process meant that I made efforts to ensure that I built sufficient rapport with my research participants to encourage them to speak candidly on their perceptions during the interview and group discussion sessions. Mostly, this meant that I spent some time in rapport building small talk,

sometimes over a coffee, before asking them the actual research questions in the interview or group discussion. I ensured rigor in my data collection by spending at least one hour per interview and one and a half hours in the group discussion to enable me to ask detailed follow up questions to the main research questions that helped me mine a very rich amount of data. Rigor in data analysis was implemented through my double hermeneutic interpretations of the insights gained from my participants instead of limiting my findings to a straight narration of their perceptions.

A significant degree of transparency has pervaded the data research process with every step from identifying, recruiting and interviewing research participants being well documented in this thesis. Coherence in the research, data collection, findings and analysis outlined in this thesis has been maintained through regular redrafts of this document to ensure my arguments follow a logical sequence while adhering to the principles of IPA.

There is an expanding body of research in the area of graduate employability. However, very little of this research views it through the lens of student self-efficacy and its contribution to their employability. Additionally, there is very limited research in this area that focuses on Indian management graduates. Hence, I believe my research will have a certain impact as it sheds some light on these two less researched areas.

3.10 Strengths and limitations

Before detailing the findings of my research, it would be prudent to discuss my perception of its strengths and limitations (Gray, 2004). Much of this is due to my role as an insider researcher who holds a significant amount of power within the institute that I am conducting research in. The dynamics of my relationship with my research subjects outside the confines of my thesis play a part in defining these strengths and limitations (Wadham & Parkin, 2017).

In terms of strengths, my position of power gave me fast access to the research subjects within my institution, as there was nobody in my college who is in a position that is senior to me, from whom I needed to ask permission. Additionally, this position gave me the advantage of having pre-existing relationships with most of the research subjects, which made it easier to build rapport with them during my interviews and group discussions and thus derive richer data from their conversations.

On the other hand, my position meant that I had to be aware of possible concerns that my research subjects would feel coerced to participate or during the interview process. Mitigating this meant that I had to set up group discussions with my faculty and students instead of having individual interviews with them. As discussed earlier, due to the presence of multiple voices and group interactions, focus groups make it somewhat more difficult to infer the phenomenological aspects of each individual's views (Smith et al., 2009).

Although the number of research participants analysed is as per the recommendations for conducting an IPA study (Creswell, 2017), it is important to remember that all of them were connected to my institution. There could be biases inherent in the perceptions of the students and faculty, due to the unique culture of my business school that focuses more on building employable graduates, in contrast to the more academic focus of other business schools. This idiographic focus is an inherent part of the IPA approach; however, it limits the transferability of my findings to other institutions that do not share our employability-oriented culture. Additionally, as my research focused on MBA students and the employers who hire them, there could be limited transferability of my findings to institutions in other disciplines like engineering or medicine.

3.11 Ethical issues

As discussed earlier, my position as the owner of the business school from which I sought to research participant volunteers could have given rise to ethical concerns about the way my research was conducted. The concerns could be the

possibility that these participants could feel coerced to volunteer for my research or would be unwilling to share their actual perceptions during the interview or group discussion process. I have described in the sections above on participant recruitment and data collection how I undertook a number of actions to try to minimize the influence of my insider position. These steps included using an intermediary to make the initial contact with potential participants and using focus groups with faculty and students, who might feel particularly vulnerable if interviewed individually. These issues were presented in my Ethics Application Form and permission was given. The permission letter has been attached in Annexure 6 at the end of this document.

3.12 Chapter summary

The research methodology outlines the reasons why I chose to use an approach based on Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and how it moulded my research design. My position as an insider researcher in a position of power was also explored which showed why I had to use group discussions to derive data from the participant groups that could be the most vulnerable in their relationships with me. I then reflected on the validity of my research before exploring its strengths and limitations.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore my interpretation of the data derived from ten individual interviews with employers and group discussions with faculty and students.

The investigation into my research participants' perceptions of employability centred around six main areas:

- a. The personal attributes a fresh graduate needed to possess to make them employable
- b. The role of a graduate's self-efficacy in their employability
- c. The factors that contribute to an individual's self-efficacy
- d. The role of colleges in building their students' self-efficacy
- e. The role of companies in building their employees' self-efficacy
- f. How individuals can build their own self efficacy

The questions asked to participants around the above areas yielded a significant amount of data, which was then organized for analysis. It was important to organize these views in a way that fulfilled the two key aims of this thesis. The first one was to contribute to my professional practice to enhance the employability of my MBA graduates and the second was to contribute to furthering the knowledge about graduate employability in India.

4.2 Themes derived

Through the process of analysis using the principles outlined in Chapter 3, I derived 3 superordinate themes, each of which had 2 to 4 themes clustered under each of them. These are outlined in Table 9 below:

Table 9 – Clusters, Superordinate Themes and Themes

	Superordinate Theme	Themes
Cluster 1	Desired graduate attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributes desired as per stakeholder profile • Methods of determining employable candidates
Cluster 2	Perceptions on self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of importance of self-efficacy in making a student employable • Viewing visible self-confidence as a substitute for self-efficacy • Perception of causes of a student's self-efficacy
Cluster 3	Developing self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of development • Social modelling • Social persuasion • Mastery experiences • Developing emotional states

An exploration of each cluster will start with the perspectives of the employers which are informed by their own experiences of hiring job candidates within the context of their own business environment. The enquiry will then move to the perspectives of faculty and students and will conclude with an analysis which illustrates the apparent similarities and differences in the perspectives of each group.

4.3 Cluster 1 - Key graduate attributes desired by employers

The desired graduate attributes identified by the employers should be viewed within the context each employer's experience. All of them are in middle to

senior level positions in human resources roles, so although they may not currently be involved in the hiring process for entry level job candidates, each one gave me their perceptions on the attributes they desired in entry level candidates based on their experiences earlier in their careers when they were involved in the hiring process. Furthermore, their perceptions were also informed by their subsequent managerial experience which gave them a broader perspective as to why these attributes are desirable in entry level candidates.

The employers interviewed fell into two categories. The first comprises people who are working or have worked in recruitment firms. The employers in this category are R1, R2, R3, R7, R8, R9 and R10. Their work primarily consists of providing candidates on a large scale for roles based on the job descriptions provided by the mid to large size companies who are their clients. As a recruiter, their focus would be on finding the best individual to fit the specific job roles being recruited for. How the candidate progresses within the organization would probably be of limited concern for these recruiters. Hence the attributes they look for may be informed by this shorter-term view.

The second category comprises individuals who have worked in the human resources departments of middle to large sized companies. The employers who fall into this category are R4, R5 and R6. The attributes they desired could be based on a longer-term view of how a new hire would grow within their organization into more senior positions. These employers may be some of the clients that the recruiters in the previous category would serve.

In spite of the long-term versus short-term lens through which these employers might view job candidates, there was significant agreement as to which attributes were desirable, although there was some difference in the reasons given by each category. The attributes most frequently cited were:

- Communication skills
- Person-environment fit
- Academic performance

- Personal adaptability
- Self confidence

An exploration of the value attached by employers to each of these attributes and the contexts in which they might be significant to the employability of graduates is given below.

4.3.1 Communication skills

Communication skills can be considered as the ability to convey information to others in an effective and efficient manner in either a verbally or through writing (Kajal, 2018).

The employers in my research felt that communication skills were important as they believed that this attribute was central to an employee's ability to work well with others, regardless if the job role required them to deal with external stakeholders of the company or just the internal team. Although it was not explicitly stated by the employers, fluency in the English language is a key component of communication skills for employability in India (Clement & Murugavel, 2015).

Employers R8 and R9 work in recruitment firms that accept mandates from companies to interview fresh college graduates for their entry level positions primarily for front line customer facing roles. Hence, when R8 and R9 spoke about the desirability of a job candidate's communication skills, they were likely to be referring to this attribute's importance in entry level customer facing roles.

"So, for fresher graduates, I would look at communication skills because that's what their primary job would entail." – (R8)

"If you have a job in relationship management, you will definitely like an individual to come across who speaks very well" – (R9)

On the other hand, R5 and R6 work for large financial companies where their subordinates hire entry level candidates into their own organizations. Both the companies that R5 and R6 work for aim to develop their employees for middle level management roles. Hence, their desire for strong communication skills in a job candidate was more likely to be because potential future managers in their organization would need to be able to convey their points of view effectively across the organization's hierarchy.

"It's very important that people come across as being good leaders. So, who is the good leader? Somebody you know who is aware of his environment, somebody who communicates extremely well." – (R5)

"You know the management wants basically all kind of communication, communication and communication. We definitely look for people who really are good communicators, that's the way it really works." – (R6)

The ability of employers to easily discern a candidate's level of oral communication skills during the job interview process may be another reason why this attribute has been highly cited, in addition to it being highly valued as a skill.

4.3.2 Person-environment fit

Person-environment fit was the characteristic most commonly cited after strong communication skills as being desirable in an entry level job candidate. It should be emphasized that Person-environment fit does not refer to a transferable skill (Bennett, 2002) possessed by the job candidate, like good communication skills, that can be considered desirable by most employers for any job role. This is a construct that assesses the degree of congruence between an individual and his or her environment.

Person-environment fit primarily pertains to attributes which form a subset of the candidate's personality that are more suitable for the specific environment offered by a specific organization. The specific attributes desired could vary according to the employer's perception of how the candidate would fit into their organization, and therefore play a significant role in the employability of Indian graduates, according to the employers. The two most studied components of this are Person to Organization fit (P-O) and Person to Job fit (P-J). P-O examines the extent to which an individual and the organization they are employed in match each other's characteristics and meet each other's needs. P-J on the other hand refers to the match between an individual's abilities and the demands of the specific job they are employed in (Sekiguchi, 2004).

It should be emphasised here that Person-environment fit cannot be strictly considered an attribute in the way other graduate attributes have been cited in this thesis. However, to reduce complexity in the way my research findings are presented, I have chosen to classify Person-environment fit as an attribute for the purposes of this thesis and will refer to it as such in further chapters.

A strong Person-environment fit contributes to an employee's higher job satisfaction levels, which leads them to performing better on the job with reduced chances of them leaving it (Hardin & Donaldson, 2014).

One employer, R7, who used to run a large recruitment firm which supplied entry level talent to call centres in India, spoke about the importance of Person to Organization fit.

She said in the 1990s the Indian call centre industry was growing very rapidly which caused a shortage of entry level candidates for open job profiles. Hence, employers were not very selective while hiring entry level employees during that time. However, in more recent times employers have become more concerned

about “cultural fit” between the employee and the organization as they are looking to reduce employee attrition rates.

“What I noticed is that hiring was more determined by a very simple thing – do you have a degree? Do you have 2 legs that you can stand on? Do you have reasonably good ability to speak English? And boom! You have a job. Over time what happened in the following decade is that there was an actual refinement of looking at those skills as to who would throw up the next leader.” – (R7)

The call centre industry in India tends to have higher employee attrition levels than others due to the repetitive nature of the job. Hence, reducing this attrition is important for these organizations (Feyerabend, Herd & Choi, 2018).

Employer R5 works in a venture capital firm that hires people to take leadership roles in the start-up companies that they invest in. The environment that they would work in is highly changeable as the work in fast-growing start-up companies needs change. Hence, R5 seeks employees with attributes that allow them to thrive in this sort of environment while ensuring that work gets done.

“We look for people who are generally entrepreneurial. People who can fold up their sleeves, get into details, willing to learn quickly, work very hard etc. more importantly people who do not get hassled by lack of structure.”- (R5)

On the other hand, R8 has primarily recruited candidates for large firms, where the environment is likely to be more stable than the firms that R5 works with. Hence, R8’s preference was more for candidates who are able to work in a respectful manner with heterogeneous teams.

“I would say even if it’s not business etiquette, it’s just etiquette; do they come... irrespective of the background they have come from whether it’s poor, middle class or rich, any class of people, any religion but I think the most important thing is whether they have the regarding respect for people

that they meet as well as their colleagues, as well as their professors or the people who interview them.” - (R8)

It could be argued that the entrepreneurial candidate preferred by R5 would be a misfit in the large consensus driven culture served by R8 and vice-versa. This underlines the fact that Person-environment fit is not singular consistent attribute of the job candidate that all employers desire, but more of a variable construct that contain a varied range of skills and personality characteristics according the specific organizational culture.

This variability also extends to the specific job role within the organization. Both R1 & R2 have recruited candidates for large companies. They held a similar view on matching the candidate’s personality to the job type, which mainly consisted of having extroverted people for roles which require regular interactions with external clients, while those who showed strong numerical or organizational skills would be directed towards administrative or back office roles.

“Do they like talking to people, do they like number crunching? You know you have to look at individual level skills as well because certain times jobs are very restricted to the desk and then you want somebody who will be able to concentrate for those 8-10 hours and sometimes you need a job where you know they have to constantly go out and socialize and you need more of an extrovert kind of personality.” – (R1)

“Say you're looking at a sales role, and you would like to have somebody who leads or who is able to convince the other.... Say you're looking for somebody in a Projects kind of role. So, then you would essentially look at what is the role that that guy plays as a part of his college group or, is he the kind who organizes? Does he have good organizing skills? Has he got good time management skills?” – (R2)

The strength of the previously examined attribute of a job candidate’s communication skills is relatively easy to discern during the job interview

process. However, many of the traits mentioned by the employers, like being entrepreneurial or showing respect to others are more complex to determine. As will be seen later, employers primarily use interviews to make their judgements on the suitability of a job candidate. Their assessment of a candidate's fit into the job environment is primarily made via their personal intuition based on the signals they observe during the interview process. This has a number of implications for the recruitment of graduates, since employers' intuition may be based on 'first impressions', which is a challenging prospect to prepare graduates for.

4.3.3 Academic performance

As discussed earlier, a majority of Indian MBA graduates enter the job market with little or no prior work experience. Hence, employers tend to use a graduate's past academic performance as one of the indicators for their perceived employability for entry level job roles (Pinto & Ramalheira, 2017). However, the perception of the importance of past academic performance for these employers was dependant on the industry sectors that they worked in.

An emphasis on higher academic scores was more apparent in the discussions I had with R5 and R6. They both work in financial firms which have a long-term view of the entry level talent they hire in the aspect that they prefer to recruit employees which could be developed into leaders in these firms over a period of time. A key signal of a candidate's leadership potential was their past academic performance. In their view, students who had better academic scores signalled that they worked hard, would be able to learn things faster and would be more likely to become potential leaders in their organizations

"A certain level of CGPA, I mean you really have to be typically top 20-25% of the class etc. that indicates leadership for granted, right? If you are working hard, you are structured, you are disciplined, okay? And actually,

what will happen is that you will actually end up getting good grades.” – (R6)

“I think it's important that if you are starting then you should show scores, you know good marks of them, so the first and foremost is a leadership quality, then you are looking at people you know who can actually let's say you know can learn quickly.” – (R5)

In contrast, R3 recruited entry level candidates at a larger scale for her client companies. So, for her, past academic performance was not so important as she felt that the knowledge gained in college was more theoretical. She was more concerned with how the student can apply this knowledge in a practical manner in their jobs.

“When they are studying in colleges they are very deeply immersed in theory. And the world outside or the corporate world outside needs application of that theory. So, their mind set with respect to practical application of whatever they have studied. So, test for this particular ability by probing questions and understanding the quality of theory that they know, more than theory which is learned by rote.” – (R3)

Past academic performance is one of the few desired attributes that are easy to discern in the job hiring process.

4.3.4 Personal adaptability

The next attribute valued was Personal adaptability. This, like P-E fit, is a construct that contains several personal characteristics and refers to an individual's ability to alter their personal behaviour to adapt to the demands of the situation and remain employable across different work environments. This construct incorporates five personal attributes, which are optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy (Fugate et al, 2004).

The employers highlighted a number of reasons for preferring graduates who possessed some of these attributes.

R10 and R3 recruited on the assumption that most fresh Indian college graduates do not possess much of the domain knowledge needed by the employer, so a propensity to learn was key to enable a new employee to unlearn academic knowledge taught in college, learn company-relevant knowledge quickly and become a more productive employee.

“The assumption in India is that the guy doesn’t know anything that will help him actually do the job, so what people come in and think is that we will anyway have to teach him everything, we will also have to unteach him what he knows so that he can actually start performing. So that’s why they want to see that someone who will be open, who will come in, who will learn, who will pick up is what they think.” – (R10)

“I think it’s not so much about the knowledge or the depth of what they know, but do they have the right kind of attitude to learn? And when I say attitude to learn, so, ability to unlearn as well and then learn whatever will be taught.” – (R3)

The attribute of openness to new experience was highlighted by R4 and R5, who needed their employees to work within a range of job roles and move into different locations as they progressed through the organization.

“We believe such people are going to be rotated through functions, through geographies, you know through levels and so on and so forth, so they are not going to be considering one particular job for a long time, so the ability to adapt and be flexible and learn quickly.” – (R5)

Optimism, which enables the employee to consider challenges as learning experiences was also considered to be an important attribute, especially as

employers suggested that entry level employees would sometimes be thrown into a range of adverse situations.

“He will work his way through all kinds of horrors and problems to make sure that you get your job done.” – (R2)

“A person is willing to give his best even in the most difficult circumstances. One is looking at it positively.” – (R4)

Self-starters who have an internal locus of control were also preferred by employers. R7 felt that this aspect was not often articulated sufficiently in job descriptions even though it is a key attribute for employability.

“They are always looking for people who are self-starters and you see that as a word that follows usually 10 other words – you see honest, you will see loyalty, you will see gregarious, you will see amicable, and then you will see self-starter and when actually what you need is a self-starter.....you know it’s a new ingredient that you are putting into your cauldron, you need to make sure it’s something that’s going to be able to add value to it quite quickly and so you are looking for self-starter” – (R7)

What seems to be evident from the above perceptions is that employers expect new recruits to join their organization and quickly learn the required knowledge needed to do their job effectively. They should also be able to adapt to new situations as needed by the company. So, the need for personal adaptability is for the new recruit to react to the situations that they are thrown into. There did not seem to be a need for the new recruit to create new ideas or proactively change the situation around them. Hence, none of the employers mentioned the attribute of creativity as being desirable, which could be a reflection of the work culture within their organization which may expect new hires to follow orders as expected by their supervisors, rather than come up with new ideas. This will be explored in a later section.

4.3.5 Self-confidence

The final attribute that employers sought in fresh graduates was self-confidence. If self-efficacy is the individual's belief that they can achieve a specific task, then self-confidence is the way this belief is projected to the outside world (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007)

"Freshers? Yeah, I would first look at the confidence levels of them very clearly." – (R1)

This confidence could be displayed in a number of ways and appeared to be a proxy for other assumptions that employers made about confident job-seeking graduates. A candidate who answered questions to test their domain knowledge with an air of confidence would be considered to have a greater grip on this knowledge than a candidate who was less confident in their responses.

"I would also look at their confidence level, how they respond to certain questions, how positive they are about things?" – (R8)

Additionally, a candidate who displays confidence could have the potential for being more successful in the job by, for example, being a more effective salesperson.

"A confident candidate... people will think it's a good salesman. So, it's window shopping, right? What looks good will sell a lot faster than the technical depth of the product." – (R10)

This seemed to imply that R10 felt that an employee who is superficially confident may be more desirable than one who has a deeper level of knowledge but is not able to display it as effectively.

Along with communication skills and academic performance, self-confidence was one of the attributes that were easily discernible in the interview process, unlike personal adaptability and person to environment fit.

As can be seen, all employers agreed on the importance of a job candidates' communication skills, personal adaptability and visible self-confidence when determining their employability. Past academic performance was only important to employers from companies where there was a focus on developing entry level candidates into leadership roles. Person to environment fit was important, but the actual personality needed was based on the type of organization they were expected to join.

4.3.6 How employers identify these attributes

Employers determined if candidates have the graduate attributes they desired, using a number of approaches. Although some companies globally have started using psychometric tests in their recruitment processes (Edenborough, 2005), the majority still rely on viewing job candidates' resume and conducting face-to-face interviews when making their hiring decisions. Among the employers I spoke to, only R10 mentioned using psychometric tests in the candidate hiring process. Most of the others used personal interviews and perusing the candidate's CV as their preferred hiring process. This is congruent with hiring practices around the world (Wilk and Cappelli, 2003). When viewing a job candidate's resume, these employers look at past work experience, academic performance and extra-curricular activities for signals that the candidate has the graduate attributes desired. However, many employers placed greater emphasis on how they felt about a candidate during a face to face interview. More than the content of the candidate's answers, many of them focused on the candidate's communication skills, visible confidence, body language and how they felt the candidate would fit into the company's culture.

“Much of the time, since I can’t spend more than 10-15 minutes with a junior job candidate, I focus on how comfortable I am with his attitude and if he is a good fit for us” – (R5)

In fact, some employers had particularly idiosyncratic methods of determining graduate suitability for a job. For example, R7 who used to run a recruitment firm hiring candidates at a large scale for Indian call centres, had a unique method for determining a candidate’s personal adaptability.

“My favourite one to throw at some is, “tell me a joke that will make me laugh?” and I usually can see somebody who will turn around and say, “okay, well then give me 5 minutes and I will think of it”. There will be someone who will say, “let me go for it, I will tell you a joke” or there will be somebody who will say, “are you kidding? I am not sure, I don’t know”. So, clearly you know from a question like that who is going to be able to actually take on something that they didn’t expect something off the cuff and take the initiative to put it out there whether they would succeed at it or not.” - (R7)

This intuition-based approach to job selection may make the employer focus more on the signals given by observable attributes like communication skills and visible self-confidence instead of less discernible attributes like personal adaptability while making hiring decisions. Employers are also aware of the flaws inherent in this intuition-based process. For example, R6 spoke about hiring a candidate who was a great communicator, but whose ability to deliver results was not as good as expected.

As seen, the key attributes desired by employers in job candidates are strong communication skills, visible self-confidence, good past academic performance, personal adaptability and suitable person to environment fit with the organization. Employers primarily use face to face interviews and viewing a candidate’s resume as the primary sources of information to determine if they have the attributes desired. This intuition driven process means that hiring

decisions tend to be informed more by the presence of easily discernible attributes over the less discernible ones.

4.4 Cluster 2 – Employers’ perceptions about the value of self-efficacy

As seen in the previous section, “self-confidence” was one of the main desirable attributes cited by employers as an indicator of student employability. The term “self-confidence” is often used interchangeably with other self-constructs like self-belief and self-efficacy (Turner, 2014) in everyday language. Hence, for the purposes of my research, terms like confidence, self-belief or self-esteem being used by my research participants indicated their perceptions about the concept of self-efficacy, even though they did not often mention that term itself.

When asked about their perceptions on the importance of a student’s self-efficacy in their employability, the majority of employers felt that this attribute was a significant contributor. However, each employer had a slightly different understanding about how graduates might exhibit it.

As an example, R4 viewed self-efficacy as an aspect of the employee’s willingness to solve new problems

“The first thing what I will look at a person is for a ‘never say die’ attitude. He looks at any problem that he has been given, he looks at it as an opportunity, he wants to always try to solve it.” - (R4)

On the other hand, R5 perceived self-efficacy to be an indicator that the employee can actually execute a task.

“Self-efficacy will speak of the person’s ability to execute, and execution is always very important.” - (R5)

The former viewed self-efficacy through the lens of attitude, while the latter viewed it through the lens of behaviour.

R1 felt that an employee's self-efficacy was not a generic characteristic, but changed according to the environment the individual is placed in. In her view, self-efficacy was not a fixed attribute but something that was affected by external forces. This perspective can be viewed against the perspectives of some other employers when asked about the causes of an individual's self-efficacy levels in later section.

"There was one program which had shut down and we wanted to absorb one of the people who had done research work for senior headhunting from this team into my team which was to recruit job candidates for middle level roles. This person's self-confidence totally dropped in this role and his job performance suffered. I had to use my counselling skills to help build up his confidence before he could do his job properly." - (R1)

As given in the previous section, research shows employers look at visible signals displayed by a job candidate as indicators of their employability (McCracken, Currie & Harrison, 2016). Many of the employers I spoke to appeared to equate an employee's internal level of self-efficacy with the external self-confidence displayed by them. For example, R7 gave an anecdote about a time she was hiring cabin crew for an airline in the 1990's.

"We had strict physical requirements of height and weight and the candidate had to speak English very well. Among the 115 interviews I had to take, I sat with a girl who was very short, was overweight and spoke with a strong vernacular accent. Although her height was probably less than 5 feet, the confidence which she spoke with, was of a 7-foot tall person. She answered all my questions excitedly and with great confidence. Although we didn't hire her, I still remember her confidence to this day!" - (R7)

As can be seen, R7 felt that the candidate was suitable for the job mainly because she spoke with a high level of confidence. It should be pointed out that hiring based on physical appearances in the example above may seem incompatible with recruitment practices in western economies. However, in India some employers have internal biases based on religion, caste, gender which inform their hiring practices, although this is not explicitly stated (Vaid, 2014). There are also no specific privacy laws that prevent Indian employers from soliciting information about a job candidate's caste, marital status or other personal aspects.

Some employers realised that their recruitment strategy to look for individuals with high self-confidence did not always yield successful outcomes. For example, R1 spoke about a case where high self-confidence in a colleague did not lead to positive outcomes.

"We had an admin manager who was full of self-confidence, knew his job damn well, great with people and all of that. Unfortunately, he had ended up borrowing a lot of money from colleagues and not returning it. Because of his confidence, people trusted him, which turned against the company in that sense. So, the company decided that the next person we hire will not be over-confident." (R1)

This is an example of the Job Signalling model (Spence, 1973) where one highly self-confident employee is dishonest so the employer gets the signal that other highly self-confident employees may be prone to dishonesty, so makes it a point to not hire highly self-confident candidates. Another example of high self-confidence being counterproductive was cited by R2

"I remember a young aggressive vice-president who used to bulldoze other people to get his work done. You can't be doing that. You need to explain properly to people why things need to be done. So, in this way, his self-confidence worked in a negative way" (R2)

Overall, most employers interviewed agreed that higher levels of self-efficacy in an individual would be a positive contributor to their employability. However, this was tempered by the view that very high levels of self-efficacy could be counterproductive and self-efficacy levels themselves could change based on the job role the employee is placed in. Therefore, their reliance on self-confidence as an indicator of self-efficacy could be misplaced.

4.4.1 Contributing factors to an individual's self-efficacy

Bandura (2010) lists four sources of an individual's self-efficacy. They are:

- Social modelling through observing people similar to oneself overcoming challenges
- Social persuasion which is being encouraged by mentors to believe in oneself
- Mastery experiences via attempting tasks stretching the individual's capabilities
- Managing emotional states by reducing anxiety and depression

The perceptions of the employers were explored along these four dimensions.

4.4.2 Social modelling

Seeing people similar to themselves succeed in difficult tasks through sustained effort, tends to raise the individual's belief that they themselves can similarly succeed through persistent efforts. It is important that the observer feels that the individual being observed is similar to themselves, otherwise this effect is not as powerful (Bandura, 2010). This is particularly strong in family relationships, where children look to the behaviour of their parents or close older relatives on which to model their own behaviour (Yao & Rhodes, 2015).

This seemed to be intrinsically understood by most of the employers that I interviewed where they felt that an individual's family background was a major contributor to their levels of self-efficacy. They had a variety of views as to which

aspects of the family background would be helpful in building higher levels of self-efficacy and which would hinder it.

“So, if you really are from a family with a lot of open culture, things are discussed openly, there is no hierarchy in the family – you will tend to be assertive and therefore you will always come across as a confident kind of a person.” – (R6)

For others, the economic success of the family was a factor. There was a view that an individual’s self-efficacy was negatively correlated to how successful other members of the family are. For example, R3 felt that a family that is wealthy could make the individual have a lower self-efficacy, because the student may not have seen many examples where the parents had to make strong efforts to succeed.

4.4.3 Social persuasion

Being persuaded by others that they possess the capabilities needed to execute a given task is the second way an individual’s self-efficacy can be enhanced. This process is not just done via positive reinforcement by others, it is important that others have high expectations that the individual will succeed. Some employers linked this to the family again, where they felt that parents with high expectations of their children could build their self-efficacy.

R2 spoke about how a child’s birth order could affect parent’s expectations.

“If the person is an elder of the two siblings, then there’s a higher responsibility from early on, there’s always that social conditioning that one goes through that says at least from an Indian context where you say, “oh, but you’re the older sibling”. You know you need to do this so that your younger ones follow suit or whatever’.” –(R2)

Social persuasion can also happen outside the family environment through external mentors, to whom a student could look for guidance on career choice.

“I think he or she would still need somebody as a confidant who would be able to guide him or help her” – (R9)

The value of mentors goes beyond just helping the individual develop their self-efficacy. They could also be a source of knowledge about best practices, career opportunities and useful contacts, which would enhance employability over the long term

4.4.4 Mastery experiences

Many employers emphasized the value of mastery experiences, in which students successfully met and overcame challenges, as an important factor in developing self-efficacy. These experiences could be gained through internships, volunteering or life experiences.

“Students who have had practical experiences like internships, work with NGOs or leadership in some types of activities. There is a holistic development of the mind that makes them more efficient and effective” – (R5)

Mentioning past internships and extra-curricular activities in a job candidate’s resume also gives a strong signal to the recruiter about their greater level of employability, as they have been through these mastery experiences.

4.4.5 Managing emotional states

Finally, an individual who experiences less stress emotionally when faced with challenges could have a higher self-efficacy. R1 felt that this response to challenges was based on the individual’s existing level of self-awareness.

"I think the starting point that has to be a lot of self-awareness, when you start self-awareness and self-acceptance –I think thinking positive is very important for self-confidence." – (R1)

Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy could believe that the stress they feel in the face of challenges is a positive facilitator to their performance, while those with lower levels of self-efficacy could find this stress debilitating.

"If you come from a family where you're constantly being told that you're not good, it can play on your mind two ways. One is that you say that you actually take that in, and you believe that I'm really not good and succumb to it. The other will be to spring back and just say I will show you how. You're saying I'm not good, I can show you I'm better than you." – (R2)

Successfully managing their emotions can also contribute to employees' personal adaptability which enables them to face new challenges in a calm manner.

What seems evident from the employers' perceptions was that they recognized that there was a range of sources that could be attributed to helping or hindering the development of self-efficacy. Much of what they believed self-efficacy was, could be considered as components of the attribute of personal adaptability.

4.5 Cluster 3 – Employer perceptions on developing self-efficacy

As discussed in the previous section, a majority of employers felt that the contributors to the development of an individual's self-efficacy were rooted in their family environment and the experiences they have had that allowed them opportunities for social modelling or achieving mastery over various challenges.

When asked if colleges and companies would be able to develop their students' and employees' self-efficacy in a structured manner, most felt that this could be

done. Although, there were also a couple of employers, like R4, who did not believe that colleges that focused on a rote learning driven pedagogy could do anything to build student self-efficacy.

“I’m not sure if I can expect Indian colleges to do anything in this regard because they always focus on lectures and exams and not developing their pupils” – (R4)

The employers’ perceptions on the ways in which companies and colleges can develop individual self-efficacy can be analysed on how they can affect the four sources that contribute to it (Bandura, 2010).

4.5.1 Social modelling

None of the employers identified social modelling as a way for a student or entry level employee to build their own self-efficacy within a college or corporate environment. This is in marked contrast to their views on how social modelling within the family environment contributes to an individual’s self-efficacy.

4.5.2 Social persuasion

Although employers did not seem to feel that faculty or senior managers can influence their students and juniors through social modelling, they mostly felt that they would be able to use social persuasion more effectively. It is possible that faculty and senior managers would feel more comfortable telling their juniors what to do, rather than showing them through their behaviour. R1 felt that this goes beyond a manager just telling her junior what to do. There is a need for a trusted relationship to build between the manager and her junior where there is on-going mentoring to develop the latter.

“It needs a lot of individual coaching kind of thing. There is a lot of trust factor that goes into it so whoever does the counselling and coaching will have to be very hands on with these individuals.”– (R1)

R7 also believed in the power of mentoring in a corporate environment. This sort of relationship is not where a junior employee is trained to increase their competence in a specific function. It is more altruistic where the senior chooses to develop their junior even if there is no direct benefit for the senior manager.

“If the line manager is somebody who takes the interest says I am willing to invest in this individual even if there is no direct gain, when you are building somebody’s self-confidence you can very well assume that the person is going to be a better performer in at least 6 months”– (R7)

It is possible that one of the reasons most employers believed in the value of mentoring, is because they are already familiar with the concept due to its frequent mentions in business literature. In fact, “mentoring” has become a commonly used “buzzword” in the discipline of management (Neitlich & Neitlich, 2016).

In addition to individual mentoring, employers also felt there was value in formal training sessions that make employees ware of the value of developing a higher level of self-efficacy.

“Most organizations have these days reduced the amount of classroom training they give employees, which I think is a mistake. I think giving employees a chance to learn new things makes them more self-confident.” – (R9)

4.5.3 Mastery experiences

In a college environment, projects and activities which offer students the opportunity to develop mastery in specific tasks, were suggested by the employers as an effective method of developing their self-efficacy. Colleges can offer their students mastery experiences in the form extra-curricular projects. R4 felt that extra-curricular projects or encouraging students to take leadership roles should be made compulsory within the college.

“To get the attitude in place there are a couple of things which all institutes across can do is to encourage or somehow make it compulsory for students to take up various roles, like cultural secretary, mess secretary and others. Doing extracurricular activities or social service like this will help a lot.” – (R4)

Extra projects beyond regular job duties could also offer opportunities for mastery experiences for employees in the corporate world. A well-defined project could present challenges to the employee that takes them out of their comfort zone but encourages them to make additional efforts to execute. R3 felt that the projects offered should be structured around action learning (Revans, 2017) where the employee's performance is assessed to facilitate improvement.

“Have special projects, action learning projects which the youngsters can be involved in. They can be assessed, their level self-efficacy can be assessed and improved as they do well in these projects” – (R3)

R3 felt that persuasion in the form of public recognition for good performance within mastery experiences was also considered useful in the corporate environment.

“In my view, rewarding recognition is one of the best, you know things to actually induce self-efficacy or you know drive this behaviour into people. Recognition needs to be public.” – (R3)

As mentioned earlier, adding these mastery experiences to employees' resumes gives signals to future employers about the additional attributes they possess, which enhances their long-term employability.

4.5.4 Managing emotional states

An individual's level of self-efficacy is correlated to their emotional state when faced with a specific challenge. People who feel depressed or anxious would have less belief in their ability to successfully complete a task than those who are in a more positive frame of mind (Lent, Ireland, Penn, Morris & Sappington, 2017).

Employers had a range of views on the ability of the individual to proactively manage their own emotional state to achieve higher levels of self-efficacy. R7 believed that an individual with a lower level of self-efficacy may not even have the desire to manage their emotional state to enhance their self-efficacy by themselves.

"What can you do to build up your self-confidence on your own or their self-belief on their own? I wish there was a formula for that, right? I don't think there is. "– (R7)

However, R3 believed that individuals can manage their emotional state by doing self-directed learning to increase their ability to manage themselves.

"People should try to read a lot and get more knowledgeable. They should apply themselves diligently." – (R3)

The majority of employers emphasised the value of social persuasion and mastery experiences in developing self-efficacy. Few seemed to believe that social modelling would be applicable in a college or company environment and were divided on the possibility that an individual can make efforts to manage their own emotional states. Employers felt that mastery experiences via compulsory extra-curricular projects in colleges and action learning oriented assignments in the corporate world would help to enhance the self-efficacy of students and employees respectively. They also felt that social persuasion through mentoring by faculty and senior managers would also help to develop student and employee self-efficacy.

4.6 Summary of employer perceptions

The employers' perceptions on the employability attributes they desire, the role of self-efficacy in graduate employability and ways to develop student self-efficacy has been explored. The perceptions of the other two stakeholder groups will now be examined.

4.7 Students' and faculty perceptions of desired graduate attributes

The perceptions of students and faculty on the five employability attributes are examined below.

4.7.1 Communication skills

4.7.1.1 Students' perceptions

A number of students realised the value of good communication skills. SS4 believed that these were essential to do well in the job interview process.

"The moment you enter a room for an interview, interviewers are judging you for the way you walk or talk, if you are able to express yourself, your communication skills." – (SS4)

SS2 on the other hand had a slightly longer-term view. He was aware that a majority of entry level jobs for MBS graduates tend to be in front-facing sales roles, so strong communication skills help in making sales. It's interesting how he also equated convincing a customer and fooling the customer to make a purchase as being similar.

"Ability to convince people or fool people to buy something. That's what people usually practice." - (SS2)

This possible lack of integrity in this view is also echoed in the views of some students in a later section on how they need to display visible self-confidence regardless of their internal feelings, to do well in job interviews. Furthermore, none of the students cited this attribute as being valuable for developing into leadership roles.

4.7.1.2 Faculty perceptions

None of the faculty members mentioned communication skills as a desirable attribute. MBS has classes in developing communication skills in a business environment and students' capabilities in this area are assessed as a component of our Corporate Readiness Score. It is possible that they took this attribute for granted as they were working in an MBA institution where a majority of students had good English communication skills and they did not see any concerns in this area.

However, as we will see in a later section, they all felt the need for a student to display visible self-confidence was important, so strong communication skills could be considered an essential component of this display, even though it was not articulated as a separate attribute.

4.7.2 Person-environment fit

This characteristic was cited by employers but not by students and faculty.

4.7.2.1 Students perceptions

Students seemed aware about this concept when they mentioned the short term need to get along with others in their organization.

JS2 felt that it was important to get along with her colleagues, regardless of whether her co-workers liked her or not.

"In a job, you always have to be on your toes as new people are coming every day. Some days, people will like me, some days they will hate me too. I need to get along with all." - (JS2)

SS2 viewed this more as competing with his colleagues to show that he is superior to them.

"You need to compete with your subordinates as well as superiors. You also have to maintain the standards. You have to do things for the betterment and also to prove that you are better than them." – (SS2)

JS2 being a junior MBA student has not worked in an office environment before unlike senior MBA student SS2 who has done a 3-month internship between the first and second year of his course. This real work experience could have contributed to his slightly cynical view of the need to compete with his co-workers as opposed to the inexperienced junior student who wishes to get along with everyone. So, both feel the need to fit into their environment, but the older student seems to feel it is important to manage this environment.

4.7.2.2 Faculty perceptions

Nothing in the faculty's comments indicated they were aware of the importance of Person-environment fit to employers. However, any mismatches between an employee and the company environment usually manifest after they have worked in the role for a period of time. Faculty are mainly concerned about the graduate getting the job and not on their performance in the role itself. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of this attribute itself, it may also be difficult for faculty to help ensure this happens. However, faculty can conduct sessions to introduce various types of company cultures to students. This is expanded on further in the discussion section.

4.7.3 Academic performance

4.7.3.1 Students' perceptions

In spite of some employers viewing a student's academic performance as a signal of their employability, none of the students cited this. Considering that a large percentage of a student's time in college is spent on being taught academic theories, it is interesting that they did not feel that gaining this knowledge was critical for getting a job on graduation. This could be a concern as a lack of awareness on this key signal in the job hiring process could impact their career prospects.

4.7.3.2 Faculty perceptions

Academic performance was also not cited by the faculty. This view from the faculty could be due to the learning environment we follow at MBS which emphasises developing and accessing our students' personal attributes beyond just imparting theoretical knowledge. However, as this is considered a key signal by employers, it may be important for them help students understand this aspect further.

4.7.4 Personal adaptability

Attributes that contribute to an individual's personal adaptability were cited frequently by the faculty and students. As discussed earlier, personal adaptability is a construct that incorporates five personal attributes within an employee, which are optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy (Fugate et al, 2004).

4.7.4.1 Students' perceptions

SS2 suggested that the propensity to learn would help them adapt well into their organization.

“Adapting to different environment. The way you behave with superiors and juniors. Go to their level and understand.” - (SS2)

A few students cited the attribute of openness to new ideas as a key component of student employability.

“You should have the ability to learn new things. You shouldn’t restrict yourself. You should have always welcome new things and not just say “I can’t do this, I can’t do that” – (JS2)

Strong resilience, which is an outcome of a higher level of general self-efficacy (Cassidy, 2015) was also considered important by students.

“You must be mentally strong. You should be ready to take criticism, appreciation and be clear in your thoughts.” - (JS1)

4.7.4.2 Faculty perceptions

Faculty felt a propensity to learn was important, but their reasons differ from that of employers. Faculty are aware that students will most likely be changing their job roles periodically over the life of their career, while the employer would prefer that the employee stays and grows in the same organization. F3 was aware that his students are likely to have a protean career after graduation.

“You are learning something but equally important to unlearn and once you unlearn that is where the adaptiveness comes in” (F3)

F2 cited the need for a student to be pro-active, which is a manifestation of a strong internal locus of control (Galvin et al, 2018).

"I think the kind of students that do pretty well are pro-active because they have gathered all the information that they need and do not wait for the teacher to tell them what to do" – (F2)

F1 cited the need for students to develop strong resilience

"I believe being successful, something called perseverance is extremely again falls in one of the most important skills for a student to be successful" – (F1)

Overall, there seemed to be some agreement among the perceptions of faculty and students with employers on the importance of personal adaptability to a student's employability.

4.7.5 Self confidence

Faculty and students were aware that employers consider a student's visible display of self-confidence during job interviews as an important indicator of their employability. This awareness was amply evident in their comments during our group discussions.

4.7.5.1 Students' perceptions

A number of students felt that it was important to show that they were confident in the interview process, regardless of how confident they felt inside. They felt that a display of confidence would enable them to hide a lack of knowledge or other limitations in front of the interviewer.

"Self-confidence is something you need to have. If you don't know something and you are confident enough to portray that this is something I know and this I don't, then people can get convinced." – (SS3)

"It is very important because your confidence can hide your flaws and display your strengths." – (SS2)

They also believed that displaying self-confidence to work colleagues even after being hired would enable them to get the job done, even if they did not feel confident inside.

"You must be confident. You should have an aura of confidence and even if you don't, you must show people you are sure of what you want which will make both of you comfortable working with each other." - (JS5)

"In many situations, even when you aren't confident, you can still always project it to make people around you feel confident. The way you speak or the way you behave should project confidence so that half the work is done."
– (JS4)

A concern that arises from the above is that employers view a candidate's self-confidence as a strong signal of their employability. Students' comments above seem to indicate that they are mostly willing to "game the system" and act in a self-confident manner, even if they are not confident inside, so that they get hired. This may be an issue for employers as they are dependent on an inconsistent signal of employability, as a candidate who shows they are confident during the job interview may not turn out to be an effective employee once hired. This potential issue in the hiring process will be examined further in the Discussion section.

4.7.5.2 Faculty perceptions

F4 believed that students need to display visible self-confidence in the classroom which would enable them to speak confidently during job interviews.

"HR is looking at a confident student, who isn't mumbling and banking on a piece of paper to answer questions rather than himself, so that overlap

between classroom confidence and confidence in front of the boss is something which I will speak to.” - (F4)

4.8. Faculty and students’ perceptions on self-efficacy

4.8.1 Faculty perceptions

Many faculty members agreed that self-efficacy was an important component underpinning employability. F1 believed that a higher level of self-efficacy was critical to performing tasks well.

“You are able to do a lot of things above par if you exist with the idea of self-efficacy or in another way self-confidence of your ability to achieving a task.”- (F1)

F5 felt that high self-efficacy helped students achieve their goals.

*“What efficacy actually means, you are breaking everything into small steps, achieving your goal and having your mind set that can I achieve that goal.”
- (F5)*

F3 also pointed to a strong self-efficacy as a major contributor to a student’s resilience

“Self-belief is important to start at any level because the idea of “I may or may not be good, I may or may not do it”, it is as good as trying and failing rather than failing to try.” - (F3)

F4 felt that a higher level of self-efficacy was important for students to overcome economic or cultural deficiencies in their own background.

“The challenge for us is that some students come from various cultural or economic backgrounds, so their self-belief is important for them to help them come up to the level of the stronger students” - (F4)

This comment can be viewed in the context of the composition of the student cohorts that study for our MBA program. Many come from middle and upper middle-class families which are able to afford our course fees. However, a significant minority come from less well-off families where they depend on scholarships or education loans to help them pay for our courses. Additionally, a few also come from single parent households or small towns outside of Mumbai. In all cases, our faculty makes efforts to integrate the students via counselling and extra classes to minimize any differences their backgrounds could make in their performance in class.

4.8.2 Students’ perceptions

None of the students mentioned differences in backgrounds as a concern, and primarily viewed self-efficacy through the lens of self-confidence.

“I feel self-confidence is at the top. I may have good communication or other skills but if I don’t have confidence, I might not do the task.”- (SS8)

This may imply that many of them correlate self-efficacy to a visible display of self-confidence which enables them to perform better in job interviews, as discussed earlier.

Although all three stakeholder groups felt that self-efficacy was an important characteristic for an individual's employment, there were some differences.

Employers seemed to view this attribute as specific self-efficacy rather than general self-efficacy (Brenner, Serpe & Stryker, 2018). This leads to their belief that self-efficacy levels would vary based on the job role allocated to the employee. They also equated an employee having a very high level of self-efficacy as being overconfident or narcissistic (Meisel, Ning, Campbell & Goodie, 2016), which could be counterproductive to their performance in the job. Faculty viewed self-efficacy as a key attribute that contributes to the development of other cognitive attributes that facilitate student success (Bandura, 1993). Students viewed self-efficacy through the lens of having the ability to display a demeanour of visible confidence, regardless of how they felt inside. These perspectives will be explored in a later section of this thesis.

4.9 Students' and faculty perceptions on factors contributing to self-efficacy and how to develop it

As with the section on employers' perceptions, an analysis will be done using Bandura's (2010) four sources of self-efficacy, which consist of social modelling, social persuasion, mastery experiences and managing emotional states.

4.9.1 Social modelling

4.9.1.1 Faculty perceptions

Some faculty members felt that a student's family environment contributed to their level of self-efficacy. However, there were contrasting views as to whether the family's economic background helped or hindered the child's level of self-efficacy. Some felt that the children of successful parents would have lower levels

of self-efficacy as they would not have any hardships, which could be considered mastery experiences, to work through.

“If a student comes from a background that the parents are very successful, the chances of the student having self-efficacy according to me is pretty low, because they do not need to make efforts to achieve anything and then have a tough time dealing with hard work” – (F2)

Others felt that students from an economically weaker background would have lower levels of self-efficacy.

“Economically low students will tend towards low self-efficacy; self-efficacy leads to low self-esteem and low confidence due to this cultural background” – (F4)

4.9.1.2 Students’ perceptions

Students also felt that family was a key contributor to a student’s self-efficacy. SS7 said that a family which faced obstacles would foster children with higher levels of self-efficacy.

“How he has been brought up, has he been exposed to the problems that the family is facing, so that may help him in building self-confidence. He will know how to face the problem and what to do so this may help in boosting confidence.” – (SS7)

Interestingly, neither faculty nor students cited the college as an environment that offers social modelling opportunities for students. MBS primarily has day scholars who live at home, so this could be due to the limited time students spend in college compared to time spent with their families.

Students and faculty views broadly agreed with those of employers where they pointed to the family as a key contributor to a student's level of self-efficacy. As seen, the impact of this contribution may be either negative or positive.

4.9.2 Social persuasion

Students and faculty seemed to believe that family can also be a source of social persuasion along with social modelling.

4.9.2.1 Faculty perceptions

F2 felt that parents who have high expectations of their children, tend to increase their self-efficacy

"Show me a child who really wants to ace a Math Olympiad, and its most likely that pushing parents are behind it. The child's confidence in math is because of these pushing parents"- (F2)

F2's comment in this case seems to be in contrast to his comment in the previous section where successful parents could cause their child to develop a lower level of self-efficacy. This was the only case where a focus group member conveyed possibly contradictory views of the influence of family on the development of self-efficacy.

Some of the faculty felt that using social persuasion in a college environment in the form of mentoring could help develop student self-efficacy

"I took presentations and one of the girls started crying and that was an example of low self-efficacy. I sat with her that after the class just to understand what is actually preventing her to speak publicly, so individually you need to sit with students and probably mentor them." – (F1)

This seems to indicate the value of mentoring in developing student self-efficacy which leads to enhanced employability

4.9.2.2 Student perceptions

JS1 felt that parents who do not expect their children to achieve much create lower levels of self-efficacy in the child.

“Family plays a big role. If a child is told you can’t do this, it will stick in his mind and will remain there for a long time.” – (JS1)

This is in contrast to F2’s perception in the previous section where parents with high expectations could make their child develop lower levels of self-efficacy.

Some students also felt that faculty mentoring would help develop student self-efficacy.

“I may not be confident enough to speak in front of whole class, but I can speak to my teacher. It will help me be more comfortable and confidence level will be a bit more.” – (SS1)

Persuasion in the form of public recognition of student achievements was also deemed to be useful.

“Gratification also works. A simple “well done” also tells him that he is on the right track. People don’t look at him as the submissive guy, so instant gratification in front of everyone is important.” – (SS4)

Although variations in students and faculty perceptions on the aspects of the family environment affecting student self-efficacy levels could be seen in the previous two sections, the overall theme derived indicates the importance of family in the development of self-efficacy.

4.9.3 Mastery experiences

4.9.3.1 Students' perceptions

A number of students felt that successfully overcoming challenges was an important way to develop individual self-efficacy. These challenges can be an unstructured part of the individual's life experiences.

"Past experience also helps. If they have done this before they can learn from that and perform better the next time. They have knowledge about it, so they are better than others who are doing the same project." – (JS6)

In a college environment, projects and activities which offer students the opportunity to develop mastery in specific tasks, were suggested by the students as an effective method of developing their self-efficacy. Some mastery experiences could be in the form of extra-curricular projects. Additionally, incorporating action learning based activities within the classroom itself, that allow students to solve problems & reflect on their performance would be helpful.

"Lectures and seminars can be organized in the form of activities which includes everyone to take part. Groups can be created around common activities. For example, a student can videotape himself speaking on a topic and show it to the class, if he is too shy to speak in public. This lets the class appreciate him and boosts his confidence." – (JS2)

JS7 felt that it was important that faculty should be supportive of their students regardless of how they perform in these action learning activities. This is where verbal persuasion can be incorporated within the mastery activities done by the students to be more effective in enhancing their self-efficacy.

"There should be activities where people are not judged. When people are judged, they get conscious." – (JS7)

Understanding the value of mastery experiences in the college environment may encourage the student to volunteer for additional projects once they join a company and hence enhance their employability over the long term

4.9.3.2 Faculty perceptions

F3 agreed with the students on the value of extra-curricular assignments, or “live projects” as they are termed in India.

“That is something we need to inculcate in the students and let them come out well doing live projects and stuff like that” –(F3)

As with the previous two sources of self-efficacy, students’ and faculty perceptions agreed with those of employers in the value of mastery experiences.

4.9.4 Emotional states

Faculty and students also seemed to suggest that the individual should focus on continuous learning.

“You have to be pro-active about it. You will get knowledge, you will get help from others but if you are not pro-active, if you don’t want to change, if you want to be in that shell than nobody can help you.” – (JS4)

From the options on how the four sources of self-efficacy can be utilized, faculty, students seemed to be in agreement with employers about the value of social modelling, social persuasion and mastery experiences.

4.10 Summary of research findings

My research methodology was based on an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) that allowed me to use my position as an insider researcher within my business school to explore the perceptions of the students and faculty within this institution and the employers who hire my students. This methodology allowed me to have an idiographic focus on my institution which helped me derive insights specific to its operations. Additionally, research shows that there are no widely accepted standards across stakeholders for the attributes that makes graduates employable, hence their perceptions on these attributes could be possibly be the main drivers for their efforts to become employable in the case of students, to make students employable in the case of faculty and to hire employable graduates in the case of employers. I was able to use IPA's double hermeneutic approach to interpret the perceptions of these stakeholders in the context of my own business school, to derive useful insights to enhance its academic operations.

Data collection from the three groups of stakeholders comprised of individual interviews with 10 employers who hired from my business school, a group discussion with 5 faculty members and 2 group discussions with a set of 8 first year MBA students and 7 second year MBA students from my institution. Interview and group discussion transcripts were analysed to derive themes and superordinate themes, which led to the findings summarized below.

Research suggests that there is a link between a graduate's level of self-efficacy and their employability. However, most of this has been done in western nations, and there is none that explore this in the environment in India. The differences between the Indian and western work culture have been outlined earlier, so the role of self-efficacy in an Indian student's employability may provide a unique insight.

This aspect informed my investigation into my research participants' perceptions of employability which were based on the primary research question; "What are the differences in the perceptions of various stakeholders on

the role of self-efficacy in a graduate's employability?". This question was explored more deeply through the following six areas:

- a. The personal attributes a fresh graduate needed to possess to make them employable
- b. The role of a graduate's self-efficacy in their employability
- c. The factors that contribute to an individual's self-efficacy
- d. The role of colleges in building their students' self-efficacy
- e. The role of companies in building their employees' self-efficacy
- f. How individuals can build their own self efficacy

The findings from the employers' perceptions reveal that the key employability attributes they look for in an MBA job candidate are communication skills, strong academic performance, self-confidence, personal adaptability and good person to environment fit. They primarily identify these attributes through face to face interviews and viewing the candidate's resume. They understood the role that a candidate's self-efficacy plays in the development of these attributes and were aware of the various sources that contribute to an individual's self-efficacy.

On comparing the employers' views in my research with those of students and faculty, it seemed possible that these groups could be viewing employability through different lenses. Employers appeared to be focussing on the desired attributes that enable a fresh employee to work well in their organization over the long term, while students and faculty seemed to emphasise the attributes that enabled students to get their first job on graduation.

Students and faculty most frequently cited the attributes of communication skills and self-confidence as being important for graduate employability. These are the attributes that are the most visible in the job interview process and could inform employer decisions about the suitability of the candidate. Personal adaptability was also cited and was primarily viewed as being useful for fitting into the organization and working in various environments. Characteristics like person to

environment fit and past academic performance were not mentioned. These differences will be discussed in the next chapter.

Most of the stakeholders also agreed that the level of a student's self-efficacy would drive the development of their other graduate attributes. Most of the stakeholders felt that students with lower self-efficacy would not be as effective as those with higher levels of self-efficacy in developing employability attributes. Hence, a student with higher levels of self-efficacy was considered more employable.

However, as a student's level of self-efficacy is not directly observable, employers, students and faculty identified the external display of self-confidence as a signal that the individual possessed the appropriate level of self-efficacy. The typical job hiring process primarily consists of individual interviews with graduates to determine their employability. This caused students and employers to view the trait of self-efficacy through different lenses.

Employers felt that a job candidate who showed visible self-confidence in the interview was more employable as they perceived self-confidence to be a signal of the interviewee's internal level of self-efficacy, which would indicate how they would perform on the job. However, their belief in a positive correlation between a candidate's visible self-confidence and their self-efficacy could lead to them misjudging the capabilities of the candidate. This aspect is explored further in the next section.

Students felt that it was important to display visible self-confidence in the interview process regardless of how confident they felt internally.

Some of my research participants across all stakeholder groups felt that the factors contributing to a student's level of self-efficacy were derived from their family environment and were developed through social modelling of older family members and social persuasion by family members. Past experiences that could

offer opportunities to develop mastery were also considered important (Bandura, 2010).

Most employers felt that colleges and organizations could have a role in developing their students' and employees' self-efficacy levels via structured activities that enable them to achieve mastery and social persuasion via mentoring.

The implications of these findings with reference to the research on graduate employability will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

This research exploring stakeholder perceptions on the link between student self-efficacy and employability for MBA students in India was primarily aimed helping me validate some of the employability assumptions on which I had built my college's pedagogy, along with creating new insights that I could use to enhance my professional practice and contribute to the wider knowledge on graduate employability. The discussion below will contribute to an examination of the extent to which those objectives have been achieved.

5.1 Comparison of three stakeholder groups' perceptions on attributes for employability

Before exploring the perspectives of each group of stakeholders, it may be prudent to expand on my own perceptions of the possible differences in the lenses through which each view graduate employability. It could be argued that most companies are interested in hiring employable graduates so they can perform their jobs more effectively (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Colleges, on the other hand, might be more concerned to ensure their graduates get well-paying jobs (Kwok, 2004). It could be suggested that employers in some companies have a longer-term view of employability as the graduate will be working in their job for an extended period. Colleges could have a shorter-term view where the graduate just has to get through the company hiring process to be offered a job. They are not focussed on how the graduate actually performs in the job once hired (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017). In spite of this difference in goals, analysing their perspectives in this area may lead to useful insights which could be applied to my professional practice.

Some previous studies have suggested that a significant percentage of employers are dissatisfied with graduate employability (Archer & Davison, 2008; CBI, 2017; Cai, 2013) as they believe that these graduates lack the attributes needed to

work effectively in entry level jobs. This view is also reflected in India where a significant percentage of employers believe the majority of MBA graduates are not employable (Merittrac, 2012; Shenoy & Aithal, 2016). However, this deficit view of graduate attributes is gradually being challenged by more recent research (Moore & Morton, 2015; Taylor, 2007; Tomlinson, 2012; Wilton, 2014) and a deeper understanding of this complex issue has been gained (Álvarez-González et al, 2017; Swingler, Bohan, Hendry, Curry and Puligundla, 2017) as employers and universities work more closely together.

A possible contributing factor to employers' dissatisfaction in the Indian environment could be that companies have reduced the amount of training they provide to fresh employees (Yadapadithaya, 2001), which may place a greater onus on the student to develop the skills needed before they join a company than was previously the case. Another possible reason could be that many Indian colleges do not have close connections with employers and hence do not have a strong understanding of their needs which could limit their abilities to develop the attributes desired by employers (Mehrotra, 2015).

My findings revealed that there were some areas of agreement in the perceptions of all three stakeholder groups on the desired attributes for graduate employability. All stakeholder groups believed that personal attributes like communication skills, self-confidence and personal adaptability which can be transferred across job roles (Bennett, 2002) were important factors in graduate employability. This is consistent with previous research into the views of employers, faculty and students, where similar preferences were cited (Archer et al, 2008; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tymon, 2013; Williams, 1998). However, there were also some differences. Employers cited past academic performance and person to environment fit as factors in graduate employability, which were not mentioned by students or faculty. Each of these aspects is explored below.

Strong communication skills were the attribute most frequently cited by all stakeholders. The reasons for desiring strong communication skills differed among employers. Those who worked in companies that looked for employees

who could develop into leadership roles (R4, R5 & R6) wanted this attribute as it would facilitate ease of communicating within the team and help in managing others. Employers who worked in recruitment firms that were hired to place entry level employees at a large scale, felt English communication skills were needed for the front-line sales or customer service roles that most fresh graduates would qualify for. Although not explicitly stated by the stakeholders, it is possible that they were referring to communication skills specifically in the English language. English is the language of global business and it is important for employees who live in countries where this is not the first language, to speak it fluently (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015; Thomas, Piquette & McMaster 2016). Hence, employers in India also look for graduates with strong English communication skills (Clement & Murugavel, 2015) and it is possible that students and faculty are aware of this need for fluency in the English language. This need for strong communication skills is also reflected in the perceptions of employers in anglophone countries, where 86% cite it as one of the key attributes they desire, although a majority of these employers are dissatisfied with the ways fresh graduates express themselves (Archer & Davison, 2008). It is possible that this dissatisfaction pertains mainly to oral communication skills as many students believe that their education helps to develop their written communication skills but does not enhance their oral communication skills sufficiently (Andrews & Higson 2008).

The Indian students in my research felt that good English communication skills would be essential to do well in interviews and would enable fresh graduates to get the job they wanted. A couple of students also recognized the need for strong oral communication skills in a sales role. Faculty did not mention communication skills, but this could be due to the fact that most of the students of MBS speak fluent English well enough for the Indian environment, so this attribute was taken for granted. However, student English fluency is not as strong in many other colleges in India, so these institutions are making efforts to improve this attribute among their students (Ganguly, 2017).

The second factor cited by all stakeholder groups was personal adaptability which is a construct that incorporates attributes like optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control and generalized self-efficacy (Fugate et al 2004). Most stakeholders seemed to be aware that the fresh graduate will be faced with different challenges and environments as they progress within a company. Personal adaptability was an essential factor that enabled this graduate to accept the new challenges and learn additional capabilities to face them. It was interesting that even students and faculty seemed to be as aware as employers of the idea that graduates may have protean careers (Hall, 2004) over the long term. Research also shows the importance of an employee's personal adaptability in their career success as it facilitates development of social capital and the ability to work with others within the organization (O'Connell, McNeely, & Hall, 2008). It is also a key component of the generic skills needed by the graduate to make them employable within the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).

The third factor cited by all three sets of stakeholders was self-confidence. However, the lens through which employers viewed this attribute differed from the one used by students and faculty which will be discussed further in later sections in this chapter.

The fourth attribute cited was past academic performance of the student. Research has shown that graduates who show evidence of strong academic performance and extra-curricular activities in their resumes are perceived to be more employable by recruiters (Cole, Rubin Field & Giles, 2007; Pinto & Ramalheira, 2017). Academic performance is also one of the signals used by employers to determine desirability of the candidate within the Job signaling model (Spence, 1973).

However, only the employers who worked for large firms (R5 & R6) cited this as a desirable attribute as they viewed it as an indicator of leadership potential in the candidate. Their firms had a longer-term view of employees where they preferred to develop them for leadership roles in the organization. However,

other employers who worked for recruitment firms where their role was just to place entry level employees in their client companies, did not cite this as a desirable attribute. Some felt that academic knowledge taught in college was too theoretical to have any practical use in the workplace. This dichotomy of views between employers within large firms and those within recruitment firms can possibly be due to the differences between organizations that view employees as long term investments that need to be developed & those who are not as deeply concerned about how long they stay within a job role (Wilk and Cappelli, 2003).

Neither students nor faculty cited academic performance as an essential attribute for graduate employability. This seems to mirror the views of students in other countries, who downplay the importance of academic performance as they see a significant gap between what is learned in university and the skills they need to develop for the workplace (Cavanagh et al, 2015).

As MBS focusses on developing our MBA students' personal attributes beyond imparting academic knowledge, it is possible that the faculty and students of my institute do not believe that academic scores are that important for future graduate employment. However, considering that a majority of Indian colleges devote most classroom time to imparting theoretical knowledge that is assessed through written exams (Misra et al, 2017), this lack of employer focus on past student academic performance could indicate that these institutions may want to consider changing their theoretical pedagogical approach to a more holistic one that develops employability attributes in their students.

The final attribute cited by employers was person to environment fit. However, this was not specifically cited by students or faculty. Some students did mention about the need to fit in and get along with their colleagues in their job, however they did not show any specific awareness in the context of the company culture in which they wanted to fit into. Morrison (2014) also says that students believe that fitting in social within the culture of their company is an important component of their employability. It should be noted that person to environment fit is not an attribute that can be developed in students, it is a combination of

personality traits that allow the new employee to work well in the specific company environment they have joined.

What seems interesting is that two of the five employability attributes desired by employers, academic performance and person to environment fit, are not specific skills that can be developed in students. These are more based on the context within which a student works. This leads to the argument that the universities should not only focus on developing specific student skills for employability, but should take a more holistic approach which enables graduates to explore themselves and discover how they are able to fit into a range of environments as they develop their careers (Collet, Hine & Du Plessis, 2015; Hill, Walkington & France, 2016). However, this aspect may need further research, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it primarily focusses on the role of student self-efficacy in their employability. That said, enhancing students' self-efficacy levels in this context could be a key contributor to increasing their willingness to succeed in a range of environments (Turner, 2014).

5.2 How these attributes are discerned in job candidates

Now that the desired attributes for employability have been discussed, we now turn to the methods used by employers to determine if job candidates possess these attributes. A vast majority of employers use the details given in a candidate's resume and their impressions in a face to face interview with the candidate as their primary methods of determining their suitability for a job (Wilk and Cappelli, 2003; Edenborough, 2005). An issue that arises in this process is that employers believe that candidates who are able to showcase their talent during the job recruitment process would have an edge over those that do not (McCracken, Currie & Harrison, 2016). This finding is congruent with the perceptions of the Indian employers I interviewed, who felt that any candidate who is able to show their attributes visibly would be preferred to those that do not. Hence, attributes like a candidate's communication skills, past academic scores and self-confidence are more visible to employers than attributes like

personal adaptability and person to environment fit. In the case of the latter two attributes, due to the lack of externally verifiable signals, most employers need to depend on their intuition about the candidate during the interview process to determine if they possess these characteristics (Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014).

The fact that employability attributes are determined through a process that depends greatly on the employer's intuition informed the perspectives of the students and faculty on how the presence of these attributes in a job candidate need to be conveyed to the employer. As most students are focussed on the attributes, they need to get a good job on graduation (Morrison, 2014), it is likely they would attempt to develop the attributes that are more visible to employers in the interview process and are concerned about their universities ability to enable them to develop these (Tymon, 2013). Attributes that are not easily discernible during the job hiring process, like critical thinking, are not an area of focus for these students (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017).

How the display of visible self-confidence by a candidate can be considered a signal of possessing higher levels of self-efficacy will now be explored.

5.3 Perceptions on self-efficacy

Recent research has shown a positive relationship between a student's self-efficacy and their employability. For example, students who work in part-time jobs while they study enhance their levels of self-efficacy which leads to higher aspirations for their careers which leads to greater employability (Gbadamosi et al., 2015). Additionally, engaging students in extra-curricular activities developed their self-efficacy along with other graduate attributes that also enhanced their employability (Swingler et al, 2017).

A majority of the stakeholders in my research also seemed to have this perception that a job candidate's self-efficacy is one of the most important factors in their employability. This aspect was highlighted when they cited

“confidence” as one of the desirable attributes needed for employability as given in the previous section. Stakeholders used terms like confidence, self-belief and self-esteem interchangeably in their conversations with me. These can be considered to be closely related concepts to self-efficacy (Turner, 2014; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). In fact, using broader terms like confidence instead of self-efficacy has been recommended by researchers as it allowed my research participants to consider a larger range of experiences which could pertain to affecting student self-efficacy (Usher et al., 2015).

Even though I used broader terms in my conversations with these participants, I also explained what self-efficacy was to each group, using Bandura’s (2010) definition of self-efficacy being an individual’s actual belief in their ability to influence events in their lives, so they would be able to reply to my questions within the proper context.

Employers felt that visible self-confidence displayed by a job interview candidate was an external signal that the candidate possessed the competence and knowledge for the job being interviewed for. Hence, this was cited as a desirable characteristic for employability by the employers. Students on the other hand, felt that displaying a demeanour of self-confidence was a desirable characteristic as this would help to convince the employer about their suitability for the job being interviewed for. This display of self-confidence was considered important regardless of how confident the student felt inside. This could be exemplified by the phrase “fake it until you make it” where you act in the way you want to be perceived until you are successful.

Previous research on student perceptions showed a number of similarities between employers’ views on the employability attributes that graduates need and those of students (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Atfield & Purcell, 2010). The findings from my research may indicate that some students believe that it is more important to show the job interviewer that they possess these attributes regardless, whether they actually possess them or not.

Faculty felt that a student's self-confidence would be an important contributing factor to the development of other employability attributes, which aligns with the USEM model (Yorke & Knight, 2004). This supports earlier research that indicates faculty identify self-confidence, team working ability and problem solving as the key attributes for employability (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). They also spoke about the value of a student's self-efficacy in enabling them to perform better in their academic work, helping them define their goals and increase their resilience.

The role of higher levels of student self-efficacy in benefitting their employability and academic work underlines the argument that the graduate attributes needed to succeed in both college and the corporate world are the similar (Magnell & Kolmos, 2017). Hence, the question as to whether it is the role of college faculty to develop student employability or their overall personality and knowledge (Cranmer, 2006) could be considered of limited importance, as developing the former does not contradict the development of the latter.

Faculty also believed that graduates displaying external self-confidence in a job interview had a better chance of getting hired. This raises the concern that some faculty could encourage students to develop their visible self-confidence over making efforts to develop their internal self-efficacy. However, this point did not come out in the group discussion with my faculty.

The difference in the lens used by employers, faculty and students on the role of self-efficacy could be attributed to the actual hiring process used by most employers, which primarily focusses on the attributes visible in the job candidate, called the object approach, rather than viewing the candidate in the context of how they will work in the specific environment of the organization, called the subject approach (McCracken, Currie & Harrison, 2016). Adopting the subject approach requires employers to work on developing the freshly hired employees to work effectively in the organization, which many are unwilling to do as they believe that these fresh hires will leave for new companies once they

have been trained (Cappelli, 2008). Hence, many employers prefer to adopt an object approach.

The main methods that employers use to determine if candidates have the desired attributes are through personal interviews and analysing their resumes. Due to this process, employers can only take the help of externally visible “signals” of the candidate’s employability (Cai, 2013) when making a hiring decision. Very few of them use psychometric testing that is not dependent on externally visible signals to determine if the candidate has these required attributes.

A problem that arises with employers viewing visible self-confidence as a signal of the candidate’s internal self-efficacy, is that many graduates today display a high level of self-confidence regardless of how developed their other graduate attributes are (Stewart, Wall & Marciniak, 2016). This means that a student’s visible self-confidence might be an unreliable signal of their true employability.

The reliance of employers on external indicators to determine if a job candidate is employable shows some similarities with the employability traits cited by students and faculty. Students seemed to be more focused on the traits needed to succeed in the job interview (Tyman, 2013) rather than the traits needed to work well in the actual job. Which means they believe that traits like communication skills and confidence are key in succeeding in the job interview. As mentioned earlier, students felt that it was more important to appear confident in front of the interviewer, even if they did not feel confident themselves. They felt that the appearance of confidence along with strong communication skills would be sufficient to convey to the employer that they have the necessary domain knowledge and competence to get the job. Unlike in previous studies, they did not cite actually possessing domain knowledge or competence as traits needed to be employable. A possible reason for this could be that Indian students are used to rote learning with an examination driven mindset where they are assessed based on their performance in exams. Which means that many Indian students focus more on memorizing their textbooks and

notes the days before the exams, writing the answers during the exams and promptly forgetting much of the studied material after the exam is over (Misra, Ravindran, Wakhlu, Sharma, Agarwal & Negi, 2017). This exam driven approach could promote a mindset where the students believe that the appearance of having knowledge is more important than actually possessing this knowledge. Possibly in their minds, the job interview is just another exam that they need to pass. Based on the responses of the employers I interviewed, which indicate their reliance on external signals of how the candidate communicates in a job interview, this approach by the students seems to be the appropriate one needed for them to get the job they want. Although faculty cited the importance of self-efficacy in developing other employability attributes, they also believed that the visible confidence displayed by a student in the job interview process would be a key contributor to their ability to get the job (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010).

Regardless of the different lenses used by the stakeholder groups on the importance of a graduate displaying visible self-confidence instead of actually possessing a higher level of self-efficacy, most had similar perceptions on the contributing factors to self-efficacy and how this can be developed by universities, organizations and students themselves.

My stakeholders' agreement about the importance of self-efficacy as a significant factor provides evidence to suggest that this attribute has a legitimate place in a model of graduate employability, as Yorke and Knight (2004) and Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) have already proposed. Although both models view self-efficacy through different lenses. USEM appears to consider self-efficacy as a contributor to other employability attributes and CareerEDGE considers it to be a consequence of existing employability attributes (Small et al., 2017). This seems to indicate that the relationship between self-efficacy and other attributes linked to employability is not one of causation in a single direction, but of an ongoing feedback loop where each influence the development of the other. This self-reinforcing relationship between self-efficacy and student employability was illustrated in an experiment by Hazenberg, Seddon & Denny (2015) where

students with lower levels of self-efficacy who were employed for a short time via a work study program and were able to increase their levels of self-efficacy and make themselves more employable.

5.4 Perceptions on developing self-efficacy

Viewing their responses through the lens of Bandura's (2010) four sources of self-efficacy, most stakeholders felt that social modelling and verbal persuasion in the family environment were the primary sources of an individual's level of self-efficacy. The effect of children modelling their parent's behaviour is well documented (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Goodnow, 2014), so it is no surprise that stakeholders felt that modelling the behaviour of parents and other family members would have a profound effect on an individual's self-efficacy levels. Family influence is also a key component of developing the student's social capital that contributes to her employability (Tomlinson, 2017).

Some felt that children who saw their parents overcome adversity would have higher levels of self-efficacy than those whose parents have had a relatively easier life. It is possible that some of them had faced adversity to reach where they were in their respective careers, so they may have felt that the experience of modelling behaviour that overcomes adversity would have positive benefits in an individual's life. Research also shows that the economic status of an individual's family is a key component of the social capital that contributes to their employability (Clarke, 2018).

Stakeholders felt that verbal persuasion from family members would contribute to an individual's level of self-efficacy, however, there was some difference in opinion on the value of positive versus negative persuasion. Some believed that parents who have greater expectations from their children's performance would encourage them to build up higher levels of self-efficacy, while those who did not expect their children to achieve much could lower these levels. However, some other stakeholders felt that if a parent tells a child that they cannot achieve

something, it may encourage some children to make an extra effort to achieve it just to prove their parents wrong.

However, it could be argued that children with pre-existing higher levels of self-efficacy would more likely rebel against negative parental expectations, while those with lower levels of self-efficacy would have these levels further reduced.

The fact that family influence was cited by all stakeholders as being a key factor in developing an individual's self-efficacy may not be a surprise in this context, as the influence of Indian families on their children tends to be stronger than those with a cultural background rooted in the west (Bejanyan, Marshall & Ferenczi, 2014).

Stakeholders also felt that past life experiences would also contribute to the development of an individual's self-efficacy, however none suggested implementing structured mastery experiences in the home environment to help develop this further. It could be pointed out that some Indian families encourage their children to take up sports or other extra-curricular activities at the school level to help develop their personalities (Das, 2016). However, this avenue was not cited by any of the participants in my research.

Although all stakeholders recognized the importance of the family in developing self-efficacy in early years, they also suggested that colleges and companies can play an important role in self-efficacy development. This could be based on their perception that organizations would have greater resources than individual families to implement projects and extra-curricular activities on a large scale with their students and employees. An increasing number of universities have implemented internships and workplace simulations on campus for students to develop their graduate attributes. These include involving them in extra-curricular activities, mentoring, cross disciplinary capstone projects, career advice, internships and networking with industries (Kinash et al., 2016).

However, previous research suggests these initiatives were implemented with more of a focus on developing job specific knowledge and competencies, rather than student self-efficacy. Hence, in spite of these efforts made by universities, a majority of employers remain dissatisfied with the employability of fresh graduates (Archer et al., 2008). However, as given earlier, this skills-oriented view of student employability is being challenged by research that puts it within the context of the environment the student is in (Moore & Morton, 2015; Taylor, 2007; Tomlinson, 2012).

Stakeholders also felt that social persuasion could be used by colleges and organizations through allocating mentors to students and employees. Mentoring increases the meta-cognitive capabilities of mentees as they are encouraged to reflect on their own development and thinking processes (Hine, 2000). Mentoring has also been shown to improve the employability of graduates (Spence & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2015). Stakeholders felt that teachers and senior managers could easily fit into the role of mentors. In fact, a range of institutions invite industry executives to hold workshops and mentor individual students (Smith-Ruig, 2013).

No stakeholder mentioned social modelling as a possible method that could be employed by organizations. Unlike the case of children with their parents, students would not be able to observe specific faculty members over an extended period of time, so would not have any real basis for modelling their behaviour. Although MBA students spend two years in their course, each subject has a different faculty member teaching it a couple of times a week over a three-month semester, so they do not have sufficient time to observe a specific faculty member closely for the purposes of modelling their behaviour. Similarly, junior employees may not spend enough time with their senior managers to model their behaviour. Additionally, faculty and managers may believe that telling their students and juniors what needs to be done is a more effective approach than showing them through their own actions. However, these are just my own perceptions on this issue. Further research would be needed in this area.

A way for individuals to develop their self-efficacy by managing their emotional states were suggested by some of the stakeholders. They felt that using self-directed learning that makes the individual more aware of their capabilities with knowledge of how they can be developed would be useful. However, it could be argued that individuals who do self-directed learning would already have a higher level of self-efficacy that encourages them to embark on this process.

The previous sections discussed the perceptions of Indian employers, faculty and students on the desired attributes for employability and the role of self-efficacy in graduate employability, with reference to earlier research. It also highlighted ways in which this attribute can be enhanced in the context of the Indian environment. In the next sections I will explore the contribution my research findings have to knowledge in the area of graduate employability.

5.5 Contribution to knowledge

As there is extensive research on the issue of graduate employability, it would be prudent to explore whether the findings from this thesis contribute new knowledge to the literature in this area. Additionally, whether these insights have implications for the three stakeholder groups along with having applications for my own professional practice. Based on my insights above, I believe those aims have been achieved.

There are differences between the work culture of companies in India and those in western countries. For example, Indian companies tend to be more hierarchical than western ones and there is a greater resistance to change among employees in India than in other countries (Jhunjhunwala, 2012). The literature on self-efficacy and employability primarily pertains to research conducted in Western countries. In the context of Indian management education, some literature in the area of employability has been found, but none that relates to the role of self-efficacy in graduate employability. Findings show that in spite of the differences between Indian and western work cultures, the perceptions of Indian employers, faculty and students on the role of a graduate's self-efficacy on

their employability mirrors the perceptions of similar stakeholders in western countries. Hence, I believe my research contributes to the knowledge in this area by providing the perspective of the Indian environment and also provides insights that could be adopted by Indian colleges and companies to increase the transparency of employability attributes sought from fresh graduates and how these might be developed.

Employers' perceptions about graduate employability attributes are significantly influenced by the signals they receive from the graduate during the job hiring process. However due to the nature of this process, employers actually depend primarily on externally visible signals about the job candidate to determine their suitability. Decisions made using these visible signals are quite subjective and prone to bias (Wilton, 2014) and are therefore difficult for MBA students to identify, where there is less homogeneity among employers than for other disciplines. For example, graduates in professional courses like law or medicine tend to have a clearer idea of the attributes expected for jobs in those fields (Jones & Pate 2019)

An aspect that was highlighted in my research was that employers recruiting MBA graduates looked for evidence of a candidate's self-efficacy by judging the visible self-confidence displayed by the candidate during the job interview. Students are aware of this limitation and believe that displaying self-confidence during the interview process was more important than possessing the desired attributes which could lead to signals being misinterpreted on both sides.

However, it should be remembered that my findings are based on idiographic research on the MBA students of my college and the sectors within which they get hired. How this aspect of external self-confidence being taken as a signal for internal self-efficacy is applicable in the hiring process of other sectors is beyond the scope of this thesis but could be worth further research.

Additionally, in spite of the efforts made by universities around the world to create employable graduates, many employers are dissatisfied with their outcomes. As shown in the literature review, a high level of self-efficacy drives the development of other employability attributes. Focusing attention on the importance of a graduate's self-efficacy in their employability, along with the suggestions on how this can be developed by HEIs offers a new dimension to the current research on employability.

Focus now shifts to the possible applications these findings have for faculty, employers and students.

5.6 Implications for stakeholders

Indian universities are facing increasing pressure to provide superior career outcomes for their graduates (Kapur, Lytkin, Chen, Agarwal & Perisic, 2016), therefore the major onus of ensuring their students develop the attributes to make them employable falls on them. Considering all stakeholder groups agree on the importance of a graduate's personal attributes, more than their domain knowledge, as contributors to their employability, the question arises as to why a majority of Indian college graduates are still considered unemployable. It is possible that employers' preference for traits and competencies over domain knowledge has not been effectively communicated to colleges. Due to this, most Indian management institutions are still focused on developing a student's domain knowledge instead of their traits and competencies. Additionally, the Indian government has not made any real efforts to help universities develop capabilities to make their graduates more employable (Menezes & Pinto, 2016).

Sharing the findings of this research that show the importance of a graduate's employability attributes with employers, faculty and students may help them start focusing on ways that these can be enhanced in graduates. Hence, universities could consider incorporating structured interventions that enable

students to develop these traits and competencies. Further research may be needed to determine what sort of programs can develop which attributes, however there are some suggestions on ways to develop student self-efficacy, as follows.

However, another perspective possibly arises when we see that two of the five employability attributes desired by employers, personal adaptability and person to environment fit, are not specific skills that can be developed in students. These are more based on the context within which a student works. This leads to the argument that the universities should not only focus on developing specific student skills for employability, but should take a more holistic approach which enables graduates to explore themselves and discover how they are able to fit into a range of environments as they develop their careers (Collet, Hine & Du Plessis, 2015; Hill, Walkington & France, 2016). However, this aspect may need further research.

University faculty can help students develop greater control over their emotional states when faced with challenges, by implementing training programs that make students aware of the importance of developing higher levels of self-efficacy along with techniques that enable them to manage their emotions better. Universities can create structured activities and projects that enable students to achieve mastery over various challenges. These mastery experiences need to be overseen by mentors who use social persuasion to encourage students to work harder to meet these challenges. This process can be repeated as the student's self-efficacy levels increase and they are able to adapt to more complex challenges which need to be mastered.

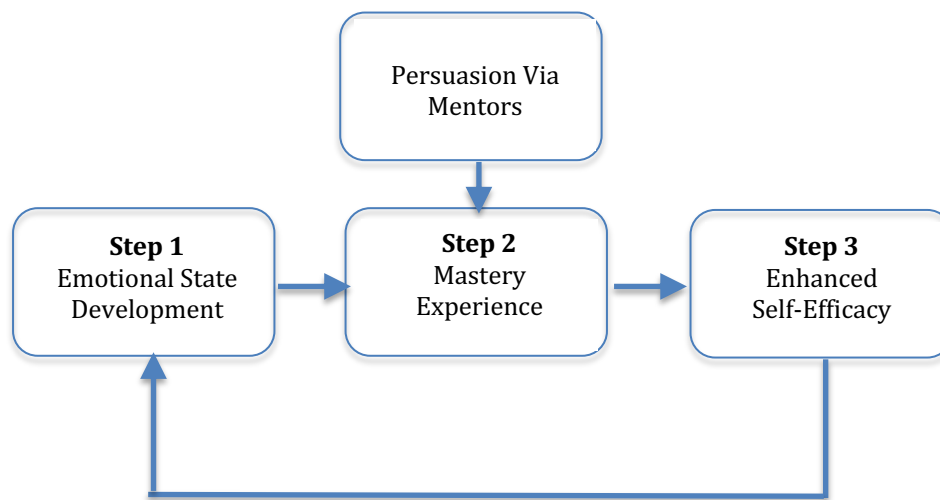
Universities already provide projects to develop employability (Clarke, 2018) and a few offer counselling or mentoring for students. However, these efforts are usually not specifically focused on developing self-efficacy. Project supervisors are often not specifically instructed to provide verbal persuasion techniques and college counsellors do not link their persuasion to specific mastery experiences. Providing interventions that utilize three out of the four sources of developing

self-efficacy (Bandura, 2010), would possibly help develop student self-efficacy more effectively. As with the universities, employers who wish to develop their employees' self-efficacy could implement structured mastery experiences overseen by mentors who provide verbal persuasion. They can also provide training for their employees with techniques on ways to manage their emotional states better.

Another recommendation for employers is that they may want to re-evaluate their recruitment processes to ensure they are able to hire the right candidates for their open job roles. Some companies are already starting to use personality indicators like Myers Briggs Type Indicators or Holland's Career Codes to determine if a potential employee's personality is a match for the company's culture (Diekmann & König, 2015). Employers could also implement tests of self-efficacy, like the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers, 1982) for potential hires to as a way to determine their employability beyond the signals provided by job interviews.

Students can develop their own self-efficacy by proactively learning about how to manage their emotional states, seeking out mentors whose behaviour they can model and who could be sources of verbal persuasion; and volunteering for extra-curricular activities and projects in their colleges. They can keep repeating this process as their self-efficacy gets enhanced by developing further abilities to manage their emotional states and getting involved in more difficult mastery projects in an ongoing cycle. This model for developing self-efficacy is defined below:

Figure 6 - Model for developing self-efficacy



The influence of family background in the development of an individual's self-efficacy levels was frequently cited by my research participants. This aspect could be a fruitful area for further research.

5.7 Implications for my professional practice

My business school was founded to create employable MBA graduates and much of its pedagogy has been informed through my informal conversations with employers and industry bodies over the years. The purpose of embarking on this thesis was to apply rigor to my understanding of the nature of graduate employability and use my findings to refine our pedagogy to enhance our graduates' career outcomes further. The findings from this thesis have three major insights I can use for my professional practice in my business school.

5.7.1 Changes to assessment methodology

As described earlier, my business school uses a measuring tool called the Corporate Readiness Score (CRS), that assesses our MBA students on five attributes for employability along with their domain knowledge. These are:

- Communication skills

- Critical Thinking
- Team working ability
- Work ethic
- Pro-activeness

These were defined based on my informal conversations with employers before I embarked on my research for this thesis. The findings of this thesis indicate that the attributes of potential job candidates that employers assess are:

- Communication skills
- Personal adaptability
- Academic performance
- Person-environment fit
- Self-confidence

Based on this, we may need to make some changes in the attributes we measure in the Corporate Readiness Score to make them more aligned to the requirements of employers. Communication skills will remain the same. However, personal adaptability is a construct of a range of attributes like optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control and generalized self-efficacy (Fugate et al 2004). We may need to conduct further research among employers to determine if we need to alter our current measures of team working ability, pro-activeness and work ethic to match the attributes under personal adaptability. We could possibly ask them how they assess these attributes in their employees when they conduct periodic performance reviews and derive some best practices from there. Academic performance is already being measured in the assessments we use to mark students in their various subjects within their MBA. Person-environment fit is not something that can be measured within the CRS. However, we can make efforts to help our students understand the internal culture of the companies that want to hire them so they can make informed decisions on which jobs to apply for by introducing research on company culture types in our curriculum (Groysberg Lee, Price & Cheng, 2018). We can also alert them to the employers'

use of academic performance as a proxy for understanding how hard students have worked and their ability to learn fast among other things.

Self-efficacy measures like the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer et al., 1982) can be used as an alternative measure for student self-confidence, although this has limitations as the two self-concepts are not exactly the same (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2013).

We will have to explore options for the possible methods that we will use to make these altered assessments, over the next few months. We will have to keep in mind that we cannot change the assessment process in the middle of an MBA program, Hence, our current batch of MBA students would mostly continue with the CRS structure the way it is until the end of their program, Any changes we make will apply to our new batch of MBA students.

5.7.2 Developing my students' self-efficacy

Prior to this research, employers told me that they hired fresh graduates primarily for “attitude” more than their skills and knowledge. However, their definition of this term was quite vague, so our efforts to develop student attitudes were somewhat imprecise. This research has focused my attention on the importance of developing the attribute of self-efficacy within my students, along with a model that develops the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2010) in a structured manner. This model has been explained in the previous section on implications for other stakeholders, and I intend to implement its suggestions within our college.

To begin with, my faculty can implement training programs that make students aware of the value of having a higher level of self-efficacy along with need to manage their emotional states better. These programs can also share techniques and exercises to enable our students to manage their emotional states. My college already provides students with group assignments, industry projects and

internships supervised by our faculty to develop their graduate attributes. However, we now need to develop these into structured mastery experiences which specifically identify the learning outcomes and attributes that need to be developed beforehand and measure the success of these aims after the project is completed. Additionally, my faculty need to provide social persuasion to encourage our students to work harder to meet the challenges of these mastery experiences, rather than being passive assessors of the outcomes. Faculty can also be made aware of the likelihood that students may model their behaviour over time, so they need to act in a way that indicates they are willing to accept new challenges and work towards overcoming them. An action learning set with the faculty can also be implemented to enable them to develop best practices in ways to behave when in the company of students to support this.

5.7.3 Personal reputation as an authority in employability

My research and the professional Doctorate I hope to receive may enable me to be possibly recognized as an authority in the area of graduate employability in India. This should help to enhance the reputation of my colleges over the next few years as we become known as institutions that enable their students to become more employable through the application of the latest research in this area.

I hope to continue doing further post-doctoral research into additional graduate attributes for employability. I plan to submit the selections from my thesis and from my future research into employability in some of India's prestigious academic journals like Educational Quest (New Delhi Publishers) and Higher Education for the Future (Sage Publications). I also intend to present my research on employability in conferences hosted by industry bodies like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and academic organizations like the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR).

My education group also has a recruitment services company that works closely with employers to place students from my colleges. They will be able to share my findings with the employers in our network.

Additionally, my family's position on the governing board of 24 colleges in Mumbai and my work on the educational taskforce of the Confederation of Indian Industry, may allow platforms for me to share my findings with larger groups of academicians and employers.

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the findings of my investigation into the perceptions of stakeholders on the link between Indian MBA students' self-efficacy and their employability. The contribution to knowledge, application to my professional practice and implications for other stakeholders was also discussed. The next chapter reflects on my personal development as a researcher as this thesis was developed and my concluding thoughts on its contribution to knowledge and suggestions for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Reflecting on my personal development as a researcher during the process of creating this thesis I have become aware of my own changing views of the nature of knowledge. Due to my background in engineering and management, my usual approach to knowledge was that undisputed facts were more valuable than individual opinions. Hence, I initially approached my thesis research with a quantitative mindset that was focussed on discovering universally applicable facts on graduate employability. However, as my literature review progressed, I started to realise that employability was a vast area of research with a range of equally valid perspectives that would be applicable based on context. I then understood the value of using a qualitative idiographic approach that would produce findings that I could apply in the context of my own professional practice. In addition, as I interviewed my research participants, I also started to appreciate the value of how exploring their individual perspectives enabled me to refine my own perspectives in the area of graduate employability. I do not believe this same refinement would have been possible with a quantitative approach. Hence, my appreciation of qualitative enquiry has greatly enhanced my intellectual faculties and enables me to use greater nuance as I develop my understanding of the world.

Addressing the outcomes of my research, I believe that the findings presented above contribute to the knowledge in the area of graduate employability in India. However, it should be kept in mind that one of the purposes of this research was to develop insights I could apply in my professional practice. This means that the idiographic aspect of the IPA methodology used meant that the findings were based on research participants who were part of the unique environment of my business school. The perceptions of similar groups of stakeholders attached to other colleges in India or other countries could possibly be different.

Additionally, the double hermeneutic aspect of my research methodology means that the interpretation of the findings was based on my own perceptions which

have been informed by my personal biases due to my past experiences and readings. Other researchers doing similar investigations could interpret the perceptions of their stakeholders differently. Hence, my research findings and conclusions would have useful insights for my own professional practice. However, their applicability for other colleges would have to be investigated further.

Additionally, this research has provided insights on the perceptions of stakeholders on role of the attribute of self-efficacy in a graduate's employability. Further research into the role of other attributes like team working ability, personal productivity, communication skills among others may be warranted to provide a more complete model of the factors that contribute to a graduate's employability.

Finally, what graduate employability is, what shapes it and how to develop it remains contested. I believe that my investigation into the perceptions of stakeholders in India along with identifying possible ways companies can improve their hiring processes and colleges can develop their students' self-efficacy contributes to the growing body of research in this area.

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Annexure 1 – Codes created in NVivo software

Coding Structure			
No	Main Node	Sub Node Level 1	Sub Node Level 2
I.	Anecdotes	1. About employees	
		2. About students	
		3. About organizations /colleges	
II.	Self Efficacy Factors	1. How colleges can build self efficacy	a. Analyze student capabilities
			b. Build awareness of self efficacy
			c. Use channels of communication outside classroom
			d. Activities in class
			e. Encourage participation
			f. Individual Mentoring
			g. Give regular feedback
			h. Simplify communication
			i. Use technology
			j. No suggestion
		2. How organizations can build self efficacy	a. Appraisals
			b. Company culture
			c. Individual mentoring
			d. Create career paths
			e. Recognition and rewards
			f. Self driven

	g. Special projects
	h. Training
3. How an individual can build their own self efficacy	a. Get a mentor b. Get feedback from others c. Join interest groups d. Keep learning e. Self motivation f. Reduce mistrust in others g. Meet more people
4. Factors contributing to an individuals current level of self efficacy	a. Economic background b. Family environment c. Life experiences d. Self driven

III.	Views on Self Efficacy	1. Alternative terms used for Self Efficacy 2. Importance of self efficacy vs other non-cognitive skills for success 3. Working with people with high self efficacy	
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IV.	Student and Faculty Views of non-cognitive skills	1. Non-cognitive skills needed for success in academics	a. Flexibility or Adaptability b. Being aware of your goals c. Being competitive d. Being organized e. Strong communication skills f. Confidence g. Creativity h. Grasping skills i. Love for learning j. Perseverance k. Personal interest in subject being taught l. Self motivation m. Work hard n. Work smart
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V.	Employer views of non-cognitive skills	1. Non-cognitive skills looked for in job candidates	a. Academic performance b. Ambition c. Adaptability
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		d. Communication skills
		e. Confidence
		f. Congeniality
		g. Continuous learning
		h. Integrity
		i. Domain knowledge
		j. Mental toughness
		k. Personality to job fit
		l. Personal productivity
		m. Pro activeness
		n. Risk taking ability
		o. Social skills
		p. Street smartness
		q. Varied interests
2. How employers	a. Academic performance	
determine job	b. Body language	
candidate has	c. Clear goals	
desired non-	d. Confidence in speaking	
cognitive skills	e. Past work/internship	
	experience	
	f. Past extra curricular	
	activities	
	g. Way that questions are	
	answered	
1. Same non-	a. Same across jobs	
cognitive skills	b. Different across jobs	
desired regardless		
of job type		

Annexure 2 – Research participant codes

Participant Category	Code Range
Employers	R1 to R10
Faculty	F1 to F5
1st Yr MBA Students	JS1 to JS8
2nd Yr MBA Students	SS1 to SS8

Annexure 3 – Interview schedules

3.1 Questions for employers

1. Tell me about your experience in hiring fresh graduates. What sort of non-cognitive skills do you look for?
 - a. What are some of the ways you find out if the candidate has these non-cognitive skills you are looking for?
2. How important a factor is a candidate's self efficacy, while you are making a hiring decision?
 - a. If important, why?
 - b. If not important, why?
3. What has been your experience with employees who have a higher self efficacy vis a vis those who have a lower self efficacy in regards to their work?
 - a. Any specific examples from your experience?
 - b. How do they speak or behave?
 - c. Can you give me an example when somebody is displaying self-efficacy?
4. What do you believe are some of the factors that contribute to a person's self-efficacy levels?
5. What are some of the ways that self efficacy can be enhanced?
6. what can colleges do
7. what can companies do
8. what can students themselves do

3.2 Questions for faculty

1. In your experience, what are the most important non-cognitive skills that enable a student to do well in academics?
2. What do you believe are the most important non-cognitive skills that will help them succeed in their career after graduation?
3. How important is a student's self efficacy vis a vis the above for academics? How important is this for future career success?
 - a. Any specific examples from your experience?
 - b. How do they speak or behave?
 - c. Can you give me an example when somebody is displaying self-efficacy?
4. What do you believe are some of the factors that contribute to a person's self- efficacy levels?
5. What are some of the ways that self efficacy can be enhanced?
6. what can colleges do
7. what can companies do
8. what can students themselves do

3.3 Questions for students

1. In your experience, what are the most important non-cognitive skills that enable a student to do well in academics?
2. What do you believe are the most important non-cognitive skills that will help them succeed in their career after graduation?

3. How important is a student's self efficacy vis a vis the above for academics?
 - a. How important is this for future career success?
 - b. Can you give me an example when somebody is displaying self-efficacy?
4. What do you believe are some of the factors that contribute to a person's self efficacy levels?
5. What are some of the ways that self efficacy can be enhanced?
 - a. what can colleges do
 - b. what can companies do
 - c. what can students themselves do

Annexure 4 – Participant Information Sheet example

Three versions of a Participant Information Sheets below were created for each stakeholder group. The one given below is an example. College name has been blanked in the interests of participant confidentiality:

Participant Information Sheet For Faculty of [REDACTED]

1st May 2016

Version 1.0

1. Title of Study

Stakeholder perceptions on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability: A case study of a Mumbai based business school. (Investigating the perceptions of recruiters, faculty and students of a Mumbai based business school on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability)

2. Invitation

As a member of the faculty of [REDACTED] you are being invited to participate in a research project. It is important for you to know why the research is being done and what it involves. This will enable you to decide if you would like to participate in this research project. Please read the rest of this document carefully and feel free to ask the undersigned any clarifying questions if you need more information. Also, please feel free to discuss your possible participation with any of your colleagues or friends, while making your decision. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. Also, this research is part of my fulfilling the course requirements of the Doctor of Education (EdD) I am taking at the University of Liverpool and is not connected to my role as Managing Director at [REDACTED]

3. What is the purpose of the study?

A large number of private colleges around the world have started a range of initiatives to increase graduate employability in response to their students' demands for better career outcomes. Many recruiters have indicated that a job candidates' non-cognitive skills are more important than the job specific skills they possess while deciding to hire them. Non-cognitive skills are sometimes also called "soft skills" and consist of a person's characteristics like persistence, self-discipline, focus, confidence, social skills, creativity etc.

My planned research will solicit the views of the MBA students and faculty of [REDACTED] along with the recruiters who hire [REDACTED] MBA graduates on what they perceive to be the links between a student's non-cognitive skills and their employability.

4. Why have I been chosen to take part?

As a member of the faculty of [REDACTED], you would have a unique perspective to share on the non-cognitive skills of the MBA students you teach and your understanding of their employability. Hence, you have been invited to take part in this project as your opinions will aid in me deriving my research conclusions. You have the chance to be one of 5 faculty participants in my research.

5. Do I have to take part?

Please note that it is not mandatory to participate in this project. You can refuse to participate or even drop out mid-way without explanation and without any adverse effect on you or your job at [REDACTED]. In such a scenario, no data related to you or your opinions will be used or reported in the project. You will be given at least 5-7 days from the receipt of this Participant Information Sheet to ask me questions and to decide if you wish to participate in this research project.

6. What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part you will be included in a group discussion session with four other faculty members, which should not last more than one hour. This discussion will happen in a commonly agreed upon location away from the college campus to ensure participant privacy. All information shared in this group discussion will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the group except for me and my research supervisors. I will be asking the group a series of questions and, with your permission, will do a video recording of the subsequent discussions around each. This video recording will enable me to remember what was discussed and will be transcribed to analyse the data further. The video file will be password protected and kept on my laptop which is also password protected.

7. Expenses and / or payments

Any out of pocket expenses that you bear (travel, refreshments etc.) as a consequence of taking part in this group discussion will be reimbursed to you.

8. Are there any risks in taking part?

We do not anticipate any risks to you or your work role while you take part in this project. The opinions you express or information you give as a participant will not affect your job role in any way. Also, if you feel any discomfort while taking part in the group discussion, please inform me immediately. You can also decline to answer any or all questions in this discussion, if you wish.

9. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct benefit given to you as a consequence of taking part in this project. However, you will get access to the research results, which may be of use in your work.

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to contact my research supervisor, Dr Janet Hanson, janet.hanson@online.liverpool.ac.uk, or you can also contact me at Akhil.shahani@online.liverpool.ac.uk and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy you can contact the Research Participant Advocate at USA number 001-612-312-1210 or email address liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com. When contacting the Research Participant Advocate please provide the details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher (s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

11. Will my participation be kept confidential?

Your information will be kept confidential. Each participant's name will be linked to a serial number. These serial numbers will be the only identifiers used in the final research report. The document listing participant details and their video recordings will be kept in a password-protected folder on my laptop. This data will be destroyed after five years, and will not be disclosed to anyone beside myself. The name of our college will also be anonymized to ensure your privacy further.

12. What will happen to the results of the study?

Anonymous results will be compiled and reported within the University of Liverpool to fulfill the thesis requirements for the researcher's doctoral programme. Participant data will be unidentifiable and demographic information will also be stripped from any shared data and publications. Raw participant data will be kept on the researcher's computer in password protected files and will not be shared with anyone aside from the research supervisors.

13. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw from participating at any time without explanation. Any contributions you make to the research up until the point of your withdrawal will be used unless you specifically ask for them to be destroyed.

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any queries, please contact –

Research supervisor

Name: Dr Janet Hanson
Work Address: University of Liverpool, UK
Work Email: janet.hanson@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Principal Researcher:

Name: Akhil Shahani
Cell: +91 9820027463
Email: Akhil.shahani@online.liverpool.ac.uk
Address: [REDACTED]

The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)
Email address liverpooethics@ohcampus.com

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference.
Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have.

Signed,

Akhil Shahani (Researcher)

Date

Annexure 5 – Participant consent form



Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

Stakeholder perceptions on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability: A case study of a Mumbai based business school.

Researcher(s):

Akhil Shahani

**Please
initial
box**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications
5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by me
6. I understand and agree that my participation will be audio or video recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for your research project
7. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the research supervisors to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

8. I understand and agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised. However, I am free to request withdrawal of data at any stage if I so choose.

☐

9. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of Person taking consent	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

Principal Investigator:

Name: Akhil Shahani

Work Address: [REDACTED]

Work Telephone: 9820027463

Work Email: Akhil.shahani@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Research supervisor:

Name: Dr Janet Hanson

Work Address: University of Liverpool, UK

Work Email: janet.hanson@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Annexure 6 – VPREC approval letter

Dear Akhil Shahani			
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.			
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)		
Review type:	Expedited		
PI:			
School:		Lifelong Learning	
Title:	Stakeholder perceptions on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability: A case study of a Mumbai based business school. (Investigating the perceptions of recruiters, faculty and students of a Mumbai based business school on the link between student self-efficacy and their employability)		
First Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta		
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Anthony Edwards		
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr.Martin Gough		
Date of Approval:	1st March 2016		
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:			
Conditions			
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.			

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC